

# Shadows and Light: Darkness Rising

by DCandMarvelFan

Category: Arrow, Flash

Genre: Family, Suspense

Language: English

Characters: Barry A./The Flash, OC, Oliver Q., Thea Q.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-08 22:02:39

Updated: 2016-04-21 19:22:44

Packaged: 2016-04-27 21:39:49

Rating: T

Chapters: 8

Words: 116,035

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: In the year 2033, the Red Arrow orchestrates a daring plan to bring his past self, along with his family and friends, to the future in a bid to save the world from destruction. But this mission will not be simple: dark forces are stirring that threaten everything he and his friends hold dear.

## 1. Prologue: The Gathering

**\*\*Dramatis Personae\*\***

\_2012 Viewing Party\_

Moira Dearden Queen (Susanna Thompson)

Oliver "Ollie" Jonas Queen (Stephen Amell)

Thea Dearden Queen (Willa Holland)

Brandon Matthew Queen (Skandar Keynes)

Robert "Robbie" Alan Queen Jr. (Oliver & Zac Barker)

Walter Steele (Colin Salmon)

Quentin Larry Lance (Paul Blackthorne)

Dinah Laurel Lance (Katie Cassidy)

Sara Lance (Caity Lotz)

Malcolm Merlyn (John Barrowman)

Thomas "Tommy" Merlyn (Colin Donnell)

John Diggle (David Ramsey)

Felicity Meghan Smoak (Emily Bett Rickards)  
Roy William Harper Jr. (Colton Haynes)  
Henry Allen (John Wesley Shipp)  
Bartholomew "Barry" Henry Allen (Grant Gustin)  
Joseph "Joe" West (Jesse Martin)

Iris West (Candice Patton)  
Ronald "Ronnie" Raymond (Robbie Amell)

Caitlin Snow (Danielle Panabaker)  
Martin Stein (Victor Garber)

Cisco Ramon (Carlos Valdes)  
Eddie Thawne (Rick Cosnett)

Ra's al Ghul (Matt Nable)

Nyssa al Ghul (Katrina Law)

Dusan al Ghul (Toby Regbo)

Talia al Ghul (Daisy Ridley)

\_Justice League Founding Council\_

Clark Joseph Kent/Kal-El/Superman (Henry Cavill)

Bruce Wayne/Batman (Christian Bale)

Harold "Hal" Jordan/Green Lantern (Nathan Fillion)

Arthur Curry/Aquaman (Jason Momoa)

Diana Prince/Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot)

John Jones/Martian Manhunter (David Harewood)

\_Justice League Lower Council\_

John Blake/Batman II (Joseph Gordon-Levitt)

John Stewart/Green Lantern II (Charles Michael Davis)

Wallace "Wally" West/The Flash II (Keiynan Lonsdale)

Richard John "Dick" Grayson/Nightwing (Kit Harington)

Brandon Matthew Queen/Red Arrow (Skandar Keynes)

Thea Dearden Queen Harper/Artemis (Willa Holland)

Roy William Harper Jr./Arsenal (Colton Haynes)

\_Other Justice League/Watchtower Personnel & Residents\_

Lois Lane Kent (Amy Adams)

Conner Kent (Tom Holland)

Cisco Ramon/Vibe (Carlos Valdes)

Barbara Gordon/Oracle (Jena Malone)

Caitlin Snow (Danielle Panabaker)

Jason Peter Todd/Red Hood (Jensen Ackles)

Thomas Dusan Queen (Dean Charles Chapman)

Walter Brandon Queen (Asa Butterfield)

Lian Elizabeth Harper (Maisie Williams)

Roy William Harper III/Trey (Dylan Sprayberry)

Nyssa al Ghul (Katrina Law)

Talia Queen (Georgie Henley)

Adrian Thomas Queen (Finley Jacobsen)

Robert Alan Queen Jr. (Jack Gleeson)

Iris Jacqueline West Allen (Candice Patton)

Nora Iris Allen (Amandla Stenberg)

Henry Edward Allen (Art Parkinson)

Felicity Meghan Smoak/Overwatch (Emily Bett Rickards)

Alexander Kyle Smoak (Isaac Hempstead-Wright)

Connor Hawke/Green Arrow II (Jamie Bell)

Lyla Michaels Diggle (Audrey Marie Anderson)

Sara Diggle (Zendaya Coleman)

John Diggle Jr. (Joseph David-Jones)

\_Others\_

Malcolm Merlyn/Al-Sa-Her (John Barrowman)

Oliver Jonas Queen/Green Arrow (Stephen Amell)

\_Villians\_

Vandal Savage (Casper Crump)

Talia Ducard (Marion Cotillard)

Henri Ducard II/Bane (Alexander Vlahos)

Grant Wilson/Deathstroke II (Jamie Andrew Cutler)

Ravager II (Richard Madden)

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Shadows and Light: Year One<strong>

**\*\*Prologue: The Gathering\*\***

\_October 28th, 2033 - Star City\_

A chill wind blew from the north, sending dry leaves skittering across the ground. Full darkness had fallen but the horizon glowed red - the gangs who roamed the city at night had set the usual fires. A half moon gave its light to the streets below.

He slipped from shadow to shadow, silent as a wraith in the night, though he kept his bow at the ready in case someone stumbled across him. Broken glass crunched faintly under his boots. A wave of smoke rolled toward him and he turned his head, holding his sleeve over his mouth as he waited for it to disperse. The acrid smell made his eyes water. Harsh shouts could be heard up ahead. He ducked down a side street as footsteps echoed off to the right. Four men in their early twenties went by his hiding place, their faces hard as granite in the light from the flickering flames washing across the city.

Brandon Matthew Queen knew these men - members of Grant Wilson's, AKA Deathstroke's - private army. The army that, along with a revived League of Shadows, descended on Star City two years before like a flood. Oliver had tried to rally the citizens to defend their homes but the city, weary of yet another bitter conflict that rivaled the Earthquake and the Siege twenty years before, refused to heed his call after witnessing the savagery of the invaders, instead opting for safety - if they could find it. A valiant effort by Star City's vigilantes to save their home came to naught; the mercenaries and League men had been ruthless. Blood flowed in the streets, families were chased from their homes in fear, businesses shut down. With the Justice League preoccupied with trying to stave off the threat posed by a resurrected Vandal Savage, the end came after three months of bitter fighting.

As the end came for Star City, so too the end came for a united Team Arrow.

Oliver, shaken by the return of a shadow from his past, gave up after Grant Wilson captured John Diggle and executed him in broad daylight as a warning to Star City's remaining citizens. With the death of an old and trusted friend, one who had been by his side for many years - a death he felt he could have stopped - something in Oliver snapped. That night, he vanished into the darkness. Not even Felicity, with all her hacking skills, could discover where he had gone.

With the disappearance of their leader, the Team began to fall apart. Three days later Dusan al Ghul was murdered by Grant Wilson's companion, Ravager. The twenty-seven year old man - who remained a mysterious blank to Team Arrow despite Felicity's efforts to uncover

his past - brought the albino down with a single arrow to the heart.

Dusan's death was the final blow for his wife. The grieving Felicity took her son, twelve year old Alexander, and left Star City for the Watchtower, the Justice League headquarters. Robert Jr, Roy, and Thea soon followed her. Lyla, Sara, and young John Jr remained in Star City despite everyone's urging to leave.

As the months passed, the city slid deeper into the abyss of anarchy. Violent gangs roamed the streets at night, raping, killing, and looting at will while the mercenaries in control of the city turned a blind eye. Homes and businesses were shuttered or taken over by the gangs. Central City did not fare much better. Though the actions of the Flash kept Central City from suffering the same level of decay as Star City, Central's plight still became serious, especially as Vandal Savage's plans for world domination ramped up despite the Justice League's efforts to contain him.

However, if all went well, tomorrow would mark the beginning of the end for Vandal Savage, Grant Wilson, Ravager, and the League of Shadows. Brandon closed his eyes as he recalled his plea to the Justice League one week earlier ...

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Let me make sure I understand you correctly, Brandon. You propose to bring your younger self, the rest of your family, and your friends from Central, plus Ra's al Ghul, to the future to show them what has become of their world and then send them back to stop Savage?" Hal Jordan asked.<em>

\_"Yes," Brandon replied calmly, not in the least fazed by the hard stare the former Green Lantern was giving him. \_

\_"You're treading in dangerous territory, Brandon," Arthur Curry warned. "Messing with time is not something to be taken lightly. You of all people should know that."\_

\_"I'm aware of the risks," the Red Arrow replied calmly, "but I feel this is the best course of action. Consider: seventeen years ago the Time Master Rip Hunter recruited Sara Lance, Martin Stein, Ray Palmer, and five others to travel back in time and stop Savage. They haven't returned." The Founders exchanged looks, but no one could deny the truth of Brandon's statement. The archer continued, "Every time he was thought to be dead, Savage always returned, because only Chayara could kill him with the dagger. I haven't seen or heard any rumors of her being reincarnated since 2016, so there's no way to stop Savage now." He exhaled slowly. "We only have one chance to stop his plans for world domination. We bring mine and Oliver's younger selves forward, show them everything up to the end of our fourth year back, then show what the world will look like in thirteen years if Savage, Wilson, Bane, and Ravager aren't stopped. Then we send them back to where they were and allow events to play out, changed or unchanged, until Vandal Savage locates Kendra Saunders. Once that happens, we locate the dagger, have Kendra use it to kill Savage, and make certain to dispose of his ashes so he can't be resurrected."\_

\_Silence fell as Brandon finished. The archer studied his fellow

members of the Lower Council. John Blake, who had taken over the Batman mantle when Bruce semi retired years earlier, looked pensive, resting his chin on his hand. It was difficult to tell what was going through his mind. Wally's expression was somber; no doubt he was thinking about Barry, missing for nine years since the battle with the Reverse Flash. Dick Grayson leaned back in his chair, idly tapping his fingers on the table, his expression inscrutable. John Stewart, Hal's protégé and successor as the Green Lantern, eyed Brandon warily, no doubt thinking that his fellow councilor was crazy. The only ones who were not surprised were Thea and Roy, for Brandon had told them and Felicity the night before of his intended proposal. Roy was grim faced and Thea said nothing, but he knew they both supported him fully. Wally would probably agree with him, since it meant the possibility of saving Barry from his fate, but Blake, Stewart, and Grayson might oppose it.\_

\_However, the final decision would fall not to them, but the Senior Council. He turned to them now, awaiting their response.\_

\_The Founders were thoughtful. Brandon looked at them one by one, his eyes skipping quickly over the empty seat draped with a white cloth - the seat that had belonged to Barry. He kept a calm expression on his face, but inside his emotions were roiling. Would they say yes ... or no?\_

\_Finally Hal looked at Bruce Wayne. "What do you think, Bruce?"\_

\_Brandon's cousin exhaled. "It's risky. There's too many unknown variables we're contending with, especially if we bring Ra's al Ghul and Malcolm Merlyn forward." He raised a hand as Brandon was about to speak. "I understand your reasons for wanting to include them in the party, Brandon, but Ra's in particular is too much of a wild card. He will use what he learns here to his advantage, you know that. Still, there are steps we can take if necessary to ensure he does not unleash utter chaos when we send him back." He paused for a moment, then said, "If you want to do this, then I have no objections. But if anything goes wrong, the responsibility will be on your head. Do you understand?"\_

\_The Red Arrow only nodded as he looked at the others, awaiting their decision. One by one Hal, Diana Prince, Arthur, John Jones, and Clark Kent nodded.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>As the doors closed behind him, Brandon sagged against the wall and closed his eyes. <strong>It's done. <strong>He felt tears welling up. \*\*Talia and Dusan can be saved.\*\*\_

\_After a few minutes he pushed away from the wall and strode down the corridor to his family's quarters. "Felicity?" he called as the door slid shut behind him.\_

\_ "I'm here." He entered the nursery to find his wife leaning over Jace's crib. She brushed her fingers lightly across the baby's cheek before looking up at her husband. "He just fell asleep fifteen minutes ago." Brandon joined Felicity and together they watched their son sleep.\_

\_"So, what happened?" she finally asked.\_

\_"They agreed to the plan."\_

\_"And they don't suspect your ultimate goals for this?" He shook his head.\_

\_"No."\_

\_She was silent for a moment, then said, "Matt, I - I've been struggling with my feelings over the last few days."\_

\_"About what?"\_

\_"Dusan - and us." That brought his head around. She continued, "Part of it is post-partum depression, but -" she exhaled before continuing in a shaky voice, "I can't help but wonder how he and Talia will react when they find out they're dead and we're married. I - I can't help feeling that we've betrayed them both." Brandon sighed heavily as he wrapped his arms around her.\_

\_"I won't say those same thoughts haven't been going through my head, Felicity, but we can't dwell on the past. What's done is done." He tipped her chin up so she was looking into his eyes. "You loved Dusan and I loved Talia. We can't forget that. And we shouldn't. But we shouldn't be troubled by it. You know the Justice League, Thea, and even Nyssa were pleased when we announced our engagement. If anyone had a right to be upset, it was Nyssa, but she wasn't. We had to move forward." He sighed again. "We will have to explain things to them, that's true, but don't think this was a mistake. After Talia died I thought I'd never find love again. When I came to you on the anniversary of Dusan's death, it was as a brother-in-law seeking to comfort his sister-in-law. A few days later, I realized my feelings for you were becoming something more, and you knew it too." He looked at Jace. "And look what that love has given us. I wouldn't trade our son for anything."  
><em>

\_Felicity nodded. "I wouldn't either. Still ..."\_

\_"Felicity," he interrupted, lightly pressing a finger to her lips, "enough."\_

\_After a second she sighed. "You're right."\_

\_"Come on," he said gently, slipping an arm around her waist. "Let Jace sleep. Where are Tommy, Walt, and Alex?"\_

\_"In the gym." She smiled wryly. "I went down there a little while ago and Tommy was giving Alex a hard time on the salmon ladder." Brandon snickered; his fourteen year old nephew/stepson had always been more impulsive than the twins.\_

\_"Tommy say when they'd be back?"\_

\_"No idea."\_

\* \* \*

><p>He was roused from his thoughts by a crackle over his comm line.

<em>"Brandon? Are you there?"<em>

\_"Sorry, Clark," \_he replied immediately, running a hand across his face. \_"My mind must have wandered."\_

The older man chose not to comment on that, instead asking, \_"Are you ready to return?"\_

\_"Affirmative." \_Brandon cut the link and took one last look out at the streets of Star City.

\_Tomorrow ...\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>The Next Day, October 29th, 2033 - the Watchtower<em>

"Brandon, it's time."

Brandon turned to regard his younger brother. Robert's voice was calm, but Brandon knew him too well; he could sense the undercurrent of tension under the surface, betrayed by the look in his brother's right eye, the one not covered by the mask that hid the burns he had suffered at Ravager's hand. He was just as anxious as Brandon was, now that the hour was almost here.

Despite his reassurance to Felicity the previous night that they were doing the right thing, now, in the light of day, doubt gnawed at him. \_Were \_they doing the right thing? What if the feat they were attempting - to change the events that had led to this point - resulted in an even worse future unfolding?

\_Stop it, \_he told himself firmly, shaking his head to clear it. \_It's done. The Justice League agreed to the plan. The only thing left now is to go forward and accept whatever may come. \_He exhaled slowly and stood, smoothing down the front of his robes. "What did Clark say to my request?"

"We can watch their arrival on the screens in the control room," Robert replied. Brandon nodded. He really wished they could be on hand to greet the Starling City party, but the Founders had nixed the idea. Their guests would be brought through time to a strange space station, John Jones had pointed out, and would need a few days to adjust to the situation. The presence of older versions of several of the viewing party's number in the transporter chambers when they arrived would cause even more confusion and perhaps wreck the purpose behind the gathering before it even started. Wally could not greet the Central City party either as none of them knew of his existence. Nor could Bruce greet the Starling group in the Queen siblings' stead; as far as Moira and Thea Queen, the Merlyns, and the Lances were concerned, the Wayne heir was dead after his disappearance from Gotham seven years before. Besides, John had said, the Starling group would have enough to contend with once they learned that three of those presumed dead when the \*\*Queen's Gambit \*\*went down were in fact alive; no reason to introduce their older selves until the first day's viewing was done. As much as they hated the idea of not seeing their family and friends right away, the three siblings had known John's logic was sound.



Together the two men left the observation lounge and strode down the corridor to the control room. Felicity, Thea, Roy, Wally, and Bruce were already there. Dick, AKA Nightwing - the man tasked with bringing the guests aboard the Watchtower - was already at the transporter controls, his expression calm as his fingers danced lightly over the instrument panel, making final adjustments. Diana and John Jones stood behind Dick, listening closely to the comm traffic as Clark, Hal, and Arthur headed to the designated transporter rooms. Since the viewers were scattered across four locations on the Earth's surface - Starling, Central, and Coast City and Nanda Parbat - it had been decided to use three transporter rooms; one for the Starling City group, another for the Central City group, and the third for the Coast City and Nanda Parbat groups together.

"Dick, we're in position. Report." \_Brandon leaned forward as the console screens flickered into life to show the three men, all in civilian clothes, standing outside the transporter rooms, noting in his peripheral vision that the others were doing the same.

"Final adjustments are complete," \_Dick replied calmly. "Feeding calculations in now."\_

Another crackle came over the line as Jason Todd - AKA the Red Hood and Dick's younger cousin - drawled darkly, "Watch yourself with Ra's, Clark. Talia and Dusan won't cause any trouble, but Ra's and his elder daughter might."\_

"Thank you for the advice, Jason," \_Clark said dryly, "But Ra's isn't a threat to me." \_A faint scoff echoed in their ears, but it was ignored as Clark continued, "When you're ready, Dick. Remember, transport the Central City group last and be discreet as you can. The last thing we need is for Harrison Wells to get suspicious."\_

"Understood. Beginning transport in three, two, one."\_

A flash of light filled the transporter room Clark stood outside of. The light faded -

and Brandon's breath caught in his throat as he laid eyes on Talia for the first time in eighteen years, though she was currently three years younger than she had been at the time of her death. He heard Felicity inhale sharply and knew she had seen Dusan, but he could not tear his eyes away from his first love.

She looked just as he remembered the last time he had seen her before their brief separation necessitated by his return to Starling in 2012. He felt tears prick his eyes. God, how he missed her. The memory flashed behind his eyes: the bullets pouring into the limo, diving on top of her to shield her -

"Brandon?" He jerked away from the light touch on his arm. Breathing heavily, he shook his head, trying to clear the disturbing images from his mind, and looked up into Wally's concerned gaze. "Are you all right?"

"No," he said, his voice sounding flat and tired to his own ears.

"Easy, Brandon," Roy said quietly. His brother-in-law laid a hand on his arm. "She's here now."

Brandon managed a shaky nod. Felicity sniffed and wiped her eyes. He reached over and took her hand. She gave him a watery smile and together they looked back at the screen, where Talia was currently embracing the younger Matthew while Ra's al Ghul watched with narrowed eyes and Nyssa al Ghul looked like she wanted to pull a knife on the seventeen year old. A faint laugh escaped Brandon's lips. Trust Nyssa and her father to provide a dramatic flair to their entrance. Sara Lance laid a calming hand on Nyssa's arm. Dusan and Oliver were both glaring at the Demon's Head, ready to intervene if he made a move toward the young lovers.

"Dusan, Talia, what a surprise," \_they heard Ra's say coldly. \_"I searched for you for years, but you always evaded me."\_

"Father," \_Dusan returned just as icily.

Oliver glared at Ra's. \_"I would say it's a pleasure, Ra's," \_he said through gritted teeth, \_"but it's really not."\_

"I suggest you watch your tone, boy," \_Ra's said calmly. \_"One does not speak that way to the Demon's Head."\_

"Clark -"\_

Before Dick could finish the Kryptonian was in the room. Ra's and Nyssa reacted immediately, reaching for their swords - only to find them gone. \_"Tread lightly, Ra's al Ghul," \_Clark said calmly. \_"You are here for a purpose, and I would prefer not to kill you before all is made clear. My name is Clark Kent and you are all our guests."\_

\* \* \*

><p>In the chamber set for the Starling City group another flash of light rippled.<p>

Malcolm Merlyn glanced around warily as the world came back into focus, all his senses on alert in this strange place. He did not know what the purpose behind this sudden abduction was, but he did not like it at all. He looked to his right and was somewhat relieved to see his son standing beside him. They had been together in his study when the light swept over him, and he had been concerned for Tommy. Evidently whoever had taken them meant for them both to be here. It made him apprehensive, for who knew what their captors might want with them? The last thing he wanted was for Tommy's life to be put at risk.

"What happened, Dad?" Tommy asked, blinking as he took in their surroundings. "Where are we?"

"I don't know, Tommy."

"I'm scared, Mama." Malcolm's eyes widened fractionally as he spun around and saw four year old Robbie Queen in his mother's arms. The boy was close to tears as he clung to Moira. "I want to go home."

Malcolm ground his teeth. Whoever had done this had gone too far.

Kidnapping himself and Tommy was one thing, but a four year old boy? Their captors would pay, he promised silently.

Moira whispered soothingly into Robbie's ear, trying to calm him, as Walter Steele moved protectively in front of his wife and stepchildren. Thea's gaze darted around the room, confusion and fear mingling in her eyes.

"I don't like this," Quentin Lance growled, his hand twitching toward his gun - or rather, the holster where his gun should have been; the weapon had inexplicably disappeared. Lance blinked in surprise and swore under his breath, ignoring the disapproving looks from Moira and Walter. Malcolm noted the Detective's daughter was there as well; the young woman looked a little green.

The other three with them - a blond young woman wearing a Queen Consolidated ID badge; a boy a few years older than Thea, in a red hoodie; and a black man whose bearing and expression practically screamed 'ex soldier' - wore baffled expressions.

Abruptly the door to the room hissed open. The men tensed and moved in front of the women and children, ready to fight if necessary.

A dark haired man with a black beard entered. "Welcome, all of you," he said soothingly. "Don't be afraid. You will not be harmed."

None of them were reassured by that. "I'm sorry," Lance said acidly, "but you'll forgive us if we don't take your word for it."

"I apologize for the abruptness of our bringing you here, but we had little choice."

"We? Who's we?" Lance snapped.

The stranger did not reply, instead stepping forward to stand in front of Moira and Robbie. The boy looked up at him with tearful blue eyes. "Relax, little one," he said gently, lightly touching Robbie's hair. "It's all right." Robbie visibly relaxed, the man's manner having an effect on him.

"Who are you?" Tommy asked.

"My name is Arthur Curry," the man replied, "and you are all our guests."

\* \* \*

><p>In the control room, Wally West stared at one of the screens as Dick prepared to transport the final group. When the light faded, he smiled wistfully at the sight.<p>

Hopefully his younger self - whom the Justice League had not brought forward, and Wally could see the logic in their arguments, though he had been privately disappointed - would get to know his father and sister, Barry, Caitlin, and Cisco sooner and be able to meet Stein, Ronnie, Eddie, and Henry. Speaking of Henry, his father didn't seem too happy to see the other man, no doubt wondering why he was here instead of locked up in Iron Heights.

\_"What's going on?" \_Barry's voice was heard over the intercom as he

glanced around in confusion. He saw Henry and his eyes widened.

\_"Dad?"\_

\_"Barry." \_Henry pulled the younger man into a hug. \_"It's good to see you."\_

\_"Where are we?" \_Cisco wondered, his hair flying behind him as he shook his head. \_"Have we been abducted by aliens?" \_Faint snorts came from Iris and Ronnie. Joe raised a disapproving eyebrow at Iris as Caitlin hissed something into Ronnie's ear, no doubt rebuking him for his reaction. Eddie paid no attention to Cisco's musings, instead scanning the chamber for threats.

Dr. Stein interjected quietly, "\_I don't know why we're here either, but we'll likely find out the answer to our questions soon. In the meantime ..."\_

\_"Dick?" \_Hal queried over the comms, cutting off the conversation in the transporter room.

\_"So far, so good," \_Nightwing replied. \_"Wells doesn't seem alarmed."\_

\_"Take no chances," \_Hal commanded. \_"The countermeasures are to be put into effect if he realizes something's up."\_

\_"Acknowledged." \_

As Hal entered the room to greet his family and friends, Wally turned away after one last look at the younger self of his missing friend, mentor, and brother-in-law.

\_You should be here, Barry. \_After a moment Wally shook his head and squared his shoulders.

Time to get the show on the road.

\* \* \*

><p>Arthur Curry led the Starling City party from the transporter room through the gleaming corridors. "What is this place?" Tommy asked.<p>

"The headquarters of the organization I helped found - the Justice League," Curry replied. "Known as the Watchtower."

"Justice League?" Quentin Lance muttered.

"Yes, Detective. Six others joined me in forming the League."

Lance scowled in distaste "You're vigilantes."

"Quite the contrary, Detective," Curry rejoined. "We are the Earth's protectors." Quentin's glare hardened, but before he could say anything Curry stopped before a closed door. He placed his hand on a keypad mounted to the right of the door and leaned forward to allow a scanner to scan his eye.

"Fingerprint and retinal scan confirmed," a computer voice intoned.

The door hissed open and Curry gestured the group inside. "After you."

They filed into a room that looked much like a movie theater auditorium all of them were familiar with, complete with a huge screen at one end and six rows of rising seats.

"What is this?" the blond woman with the QC badge asked suspiciously. "Are you saying we were brought here to watch a movie?" Malcolm scowled in distaste - was this someone's idea of a joke? Moira gave Curry an icy glare as she shifted Robbie to her other hip.

Before Curry could respond the door opened again and the other Justice Leaguers entered with the rest of the guests behind them - except for three. Curry raised an eyebrow at Kent and the Kryptonian nodded, confirming the three were waiting outside as instructed.

"All right," Thea demanded, "what's going on here?"

"Patience, Miss Queen," Curry advised. "Let us make the necessary introductions first." Thea subsided as Tommy laid a warning hand on her arm. "Before we get started, though, I regret that I have to do this." Without warning he stepped close to Thea and plunged a needle into her arm.

Moira cried out in alarm, Walter hissed in anger, and Tommy shouted, "What are you doing?!" as Thea collapsed. Curry quickly knelt beside the girl as she began to vomit, leaning her head over a bowl so she would not retch on the floor. Henry and Caitlin both stepped forward, concerned for her, but the other Justice Leaguers held them back and warned the rest of the group to stay where they were. Once Thea's heaves subsided, Curry handed her a glass of water.

"Drink this." Thea did as she was told, drinking the water greedily. A young man slipped into the room and took the bowl, leaving as quickly as he had come.

"What was that?" Tommy demanded, glaring at their hosts.

"Sobering agent," Curry replied. Tommy took a step back in shock. "Oh, yes, Mr. Merlyn, we know about Miss Queen's drug habits. She's lucky that she hasn't OD'ed yet."

"Thea," Moira whispered, glaring at her daughter, "what have you done?" Thea stared at her mother as she stood shakily, but did not reply. Henry went to Thea's side and gently took her arm.

"Are you all right?" he asked quietly. Thea managed a nod.

One of their guides cleared his throat. "First things first. As my fellow hosts should have told you, this is the Watchtower, the headquarters of an organization known as the Justice League. My name is Hal Jordan. The other men are Clark Kent -" Kent nodded as Jordan gestured to him - and Arthur Curry. The three of us, along with four other men and women, founded the League."

Ra's raised an eyebrow. "Interesting. Tell me, Mr. Jordan, what does this League do?"

"As Mr. Curry so informed Detective Lance -" Quentin shot the man a nasty scowl at that, but Jordan continued without missing a beat " - the purpose of the Justice League is to protect the people of Earth from the machinations of supervillains who would love nothing more than to see the human race ground to dust beneath their heels. For the last eleven years, the League has watched over Earth and protected those who are vulnerable. You called us vigilantes, Detective, but that is the wrong term to use. We may operate outside the law, but there are times when going outside the law to find justice is the right recourse - and the only recourse." Lance and Laurel both glared at Jordan this time; Ra's, his children, and Malcolm had to hide their amusement at how blatantly this man was challenging a precept both father and daughter lived by. Joe West and Eddie Thawne, too, did not seem too pleased with Jordan's statement, though Barry gave him a thumbs up. Iris slapped him on the arm and Barry had the grace to look abashed as he glanced at his father and Joe.

"Let's move on, shall we?" Kent suggested. Jordan nodded.

"Form Central City, Barry Allen, a CSI with the Central City Police Department." The dark haired young man gave the others a lopsided smile. "His father, Henry Allen." More than a few eyebrows shot up among the Starling group at this; most of the adults had read the newspaper accounts of Nora Allen's murder and her husband's arrest for the crime. Henry merely nodded acknowledgement of the fact.

"Detective Joe West of the CCPD." The black man gave everyone a smile and Quentin offered a salute. Joe laughed as he returned it, as did the third cop in the group. "Ah, yes," Jordan said with a grin, "Eddie Thawne of the Keystone City PD." Thawne laughed again.

"Three cops on a space station. What a sight," he joked.

The young woman standing beside Joe smiled. "Detective West's daughter Iris," Jordan continued. Laurel offered Iris a smile, recognizing in her a shared bond since they both had detective fathers.

"Dr. Caitlin Snow and her fiancÃ© Ronnie Raymond." The brunette woman grinned and Ronnie smirked.

"Cisco Ramon." All eyes turned to the black haired young man, who gulped nervously and managed a faint smile.

"Dr. Martin Stein." The older, distinguished looking gentleman smiled.

Curry picked up from there. "From Starling City, Moira Queen, her children Thea and Robbie, and her husband Walter Steele, CEO of Queen Consolidated." Cisco gave an awestruck whistle, only to flush as Moira and Walter both looked at him.

"Malcolm Merlyn, CEO of Merlyn Global, and his son Thomas." Barry whistled this time and Henry shot his son a stern look - he had heard Malcolm's name before and thought him an unscrupulous businessman.

Malcolm noted that Curry had made no reference to his past with the League, which suited him perfectly - he was not ready for Tommy, Moira, or Detective Lance to know that. Though, with the presence of Ra's al Ghul, he knew it was only a matter of time before the truth came out. He was careful to keep the dismay he felt from showing on his face, for he did not want Tommy to start asking questions. He also knew it was likely that Moira would never trust him around Robbie again.

"Detective Quentin Lance of the SCPD and his daughter Laurel, an attorney for the city." Laurel tried unsuccessfully to hide a smirk.

"Felicity Smoak, an IT tech at Queen Consolidated." The young woman blushed under all the stares, though Walter smiled in recognition.

"John Diggle, formerly a soldier with Special Forces, now a private security guard." Diggle gave the others a smile.

"Roy Harper." All eyes turned to the young man, coolly assessing him, wondering what he was doing here. He met their scrutiny without flinching.

Kent spoke then, his voice cold as he regarded the group. "Last, Ra's al Ghul, leader of a shadow organization known as the League of Assassins." Most of the guests got a sinking feeling in their stomachs on hearing that; they instinctively knew that the tall, imposing, dark haired man in black robes was dangerous.

"Ra's' children, Nyssa al Ghul, Heir to the Demon, Dusan al Ghul, and Talia al Ghul." The three regarded their fellow guests with cool expressions.

"All of you are wondering why you were brought here," Kent continued. "The reason is simple: this is the future, the year 2033 to be exact." Shocked murmurs rippled through the crowd, but Kent raised a hand for silence. "You will have time to digest this in the coming days, and we will explain more when we so choose. For now, all you need to know is that in the past, in this timeline's past, all of you played an important role in the lives of two of our fellow superheroes, the two who started it all: the Green Arrow and his younger brother, the Red Arrow. What you are about to see is the events that shaped them into the men they became."

Quentin Lance snorted in disdain. "You expect us to believe that crap?" he said sharply.

"Believe it or not, Quentin, it is the truth," Kent replied calmly, unfazed by the man's ire, though everyone else was thinking much the same as Lance. "But there's more to it. Most of you already know who the Arrows are."

Malcolm scoffed. "How so?" he said mockingly.

"Because the Arrows are residents of your own city, Mr. Merlyn - prominent residents, in fact - and because they, along with one other, were the only survivors of the sinking of the \*\*Queen's Gambit \*\*in 2007."

Before anyone had a chance to process this unexpected revelation, the door opened again and three more people entered the room.

Moirira's hand flew to her mouth as she saw her elder sons standing there, both wearing what appeared to be army fatigues. Oliver had changed from the last time she had seen him before the yacht sailed; he had filled out a little more, his hair was lighter and longer, his eyes almost cold, but it was the change in Matthew that shook her the most.

Her younger son was no longer the scrawny, thin twelve year old she remembered. He had grown, almost as tall as Oliver now; muscle rippled in his arms and his shoulders had broadened. His hair, dark as ever, hung almost to his shoulders. Moirira's heart broke as she saw the coldness in his eyes, a coldness she had often seen in his true father's. What had happened to him in those five years? Another blow came when she saw the scar marring his right eye, a twist of black breaking the gleam of the blue iris. It was an unnerving sight.

Thea could not reconcile the men before her with the brothers she remembered. Oliver was still recognizable despite his longer hair, but Matthew was a virtual stranger.

Walter was stunned to see his stepsons, for he had never thought they would survive the **Gambit's** sinking.

Tommy stared in disbelief at his best friend and surrogate brothers for a second before a smile broke across his face. His elation was tempered, though, by the coldness he saw in their faces. \_What hell did Oliver and Matthew go through? \_he wondered.

Malcolm felt a twinge of regret. Not for Oliver - the boy had been foolish in begging Robert to allow him to go on the **Gambit**- but for Matthew. He recalled how devastated Moirira had been when told of the accident; of her three children she had been closest to her younger son. Despite his anger at Robert for his betrayal, the last thing Malcolm had wanted was for Matthew to be caught in the crossfire. Unfortunately he had not learned of Matthew's presence on the **Gambit** until Robert had already sailed, and by then it was too late. As he looked at Matthew now, Malcolm wondered just how much the boy had changed.

The shocked silence was broken as Thea rushed forward and threw her arms around her twin. "I knew you were alive! I missed you both so much." A small but genuine smile crossed Matthew's face.

"I missed you too, Thea." He pulled her close, resting his chin on her hair, as Moirira handed Robbie to Tommy and went to embrace both her sons.

A few feet away another reunion was taking place. Quentin's eyes had bugged out and Laurel could only stare in shock when they saw Sara Lance. Their minds were whirling. It couldn't be true - Sara had died when the **Gambit** went down. Yet they couldn't deny the truth before them now. Quentin was tempted to accuse their hosts of playing a cruel joke, but deep down he knew it was Sara - she looked much the same as she had five years ago, a little grimmer perhaps, but he still recognized her. She was his baby girl, after all.

Sara took a step forward, her eyes on her father. "Dad?" That single



word broke the dam. Quentin rushed forward and pulled Sara into an embrace, tears in his eyes.

"Oh, Sara. Oh, baby."

Sara smiled weakly. "It's OK, Dad. I'm home."

Laurel was watching with a dumbfounded expression as her father embraced her sister. "Sara?" she finally croaked. Sara's head whipped around and the two locked eyes.

"Laurel." Sara gave her older sister a hesitant smile, but before she could go to Laurel Quentin pulled away from his younger daughter and rushed at Oliver Queen with his hand raised. Thea shouted for the Detective to stop and Roy grabbed for his arm, but was too slow. Oliver pushed his brother back as Matthew tried to step in front of him and simply stood there as Quentin's hand made contact with the side of his face, though he rolled his head slightly so Quentin wouldn't break any bones.

"Feel better, Detective?" Oliver asked calmly as Lance glared at him, shaking his hand.

"Much," the man ground out.

Matthew gave Lance a harsh glare before wheeling on Arthur Curry. "I heard what you said," he growled, "and I don't like it one bit. What gives you the right to show our family, friends, and these strangers what happened to us after the \*\*Gambit \*\*went down? It was five years of hell on a deserted island!"

Curry looked at him sympathetically. "I'm sorry you and your brother suffered so much, Matthew, but they must see what happened to you on Lian Yu."

"Why?" Oliver ground out, spearing the three Justice Leaguers with an icy stare. "What is the purpose behind all this?"

"What gives you the right to abduct us and bring us here, and why should we trust anything you say?" Dr. Stein added.

"The purpose is twofold, Oliver. First, because many of the people in this room, yourself included, have kept secrets from family and friends." Oliver glowered at Hal Jordan; beside him Matthew ground his teeth, clenching his hand into a fist. The younger Queen was sorely tempted to deck the arrogant stranger, but had a feeling he would be pushing his luck if he tried to do so. "Make no mistake," Jordan said sharply, "the secrets and lies \_will \_come out, no matter how much you try to hide them." He swept his gaze across the crowd. Moira glared at him with an expression equal parts fear and rage. Malcolm had a sneer on his face, though he glanced at Ra's. Tommy and Laurel both looked uncomfortable and avoided their fathers' eyes. Thea simply looked confused. "Those of you from Starling City have more skeletons in the closet than your friends from Central City, but the Central City group will still have their own secrets to deal with." Everyone from Central City glared at Jordan now.

"Why should we agree to this?" Matthew demanded.

Kent tapped his earpiece and a second later the screen flickered to

life.

Thea choked back a sob. Oliver took a step forward, his breath hitching in his chest as he stared at the screen. Matthew's face drained of color. Talia laid a hand on his arm. He covered her hand with his, but could not tear his eyes away from what he was seeing. Walter stared stoically at the screen. Malcolm pressed his lips together, fighting down the emotion that threatened to overwhelm him. Tommy held both Thea and Robbie close, his own expression one of devastation. Quentin swore softly and Laurel sniffed as she fought back tears. The others stared at the image with mingled expressions of shock and sorrow.

The inscription on the headstone that a slightly older Matthew Queen knelt before read: \*\*Moira Dearden Queen. 1964-2014.\*\*

Moira was pale as she saw the date in front of the year of death. "Oh, God," she murmured. "Robbie's sixth birthday?" Kent nodded solemnly.

"H-" Matthew's voice cracked and he had to pause to regain his composure. "How did it happen?"

"An old enemy of yours and Oliver's," Jordan replied. "You never told your mother and sister about him, and you mother's death was the result."

Oliver's mind was furiously working and the conclusion he reached was stunning. "Slade Wilson," he rasped, locking eyes with his hosts. "He's still alive, isn't he?" Matthew snarled in rage, frustration, and disbelief, clenching his hands so hard that the fingernails drew blood from his palms. Sara stiffened at the mention of Slade's name and Nyssa wrapped an arm around her, whispering something in Arabic into her ear.

"He's dead," Matthew said flatly. "Oliver shoved an arrow through his eye."

Kent shook his head. "Slade still lives."

"How?" Nyssa demanded, staring imperiously at the Kryptonian, who was not in the least fazed.

"You're well aware of how he survived."

By this point everyone except Ra's, Dusan, and Talia were trading confused looks. "Excuse me." Tommy said hesitantly, "but who exactly is Slade Wilson?"

"An ex ASIS soldier Oliver and I met on Lian Yu," Matthew snarled.

"Wait, I thought you said the island was deserted," Thea interjected as she wiped her eyes. Matthew shook his head.

"Far from it, Thea. Slade was stranded on the island, just as we were. He taught us how to survive, but later turned on us without a second thought. He promised ... he promised Oliver would know complete despair before he died." He turned away from the haunting image. "Evidently he made good on that promise."

"Not entirely, Matthew," Kent said gently. "Take comfort in that."

Matthew snorted bitterly. "Small comfort, sir."

"Matthew, Oliver." The sternness in Kent's voice brought everyone's eyes to him. "I understand the rage you're feeling at what Slade did to you, but know this - in the five years between your fight on Lian Yu and his reappearance in Starling, he was tormented by the island and paid a terrible price for it."

"What are you talking about?" Oliver demanded.

"I will explain what I mean later, Oliver. And when I do, promise that you will listen and not be quick to judge." After a moment, Oliver reluctantly nodded.

"The second reason all of you were brought here is to create a better future for yourselves," Jordan added. "Those of you that survived to today have seen much loss and adversity. It is our hope that by bringing you here and showing you these recordings, you can change your future for the better."

Oliver stared at the man. \_A better future? \_he thought.

Matthew was still stunned over the fact that Slade lived, but Jordan's words brought his head up. Could his mother's death perhaps be prevented, then?

Thea was growing more confused with each passing second. They had been brought here to change the past? Why? These strangers' explanation made no sense to her.

Moira felt dread claw at her heart. Seeing what was apparently her own grave had shaken her to the core. She wondered who else was dead by now. Was Walter? Were any of her children? She desperately hoped not.

Walter was apprehensive, but also intrigued by what he was hearing.

Malcom's eyes narrowed. He knew there was something these men were not telling them. The question was: what was it? More, would his role in the \*\*Gambit's \*\*sinking be exposed? The fact that he was his own enforcer or his plans for the Undertaking?

Tommy looked around the room, wondering just what other surprises were in store for them.

Quentin was more and more certain that this had to be some kind of setup. Bringing them into the future to change the past? \_Yeah, right, \_he thought. \_I need a drink.\_

Even as she hugged Sara, Laurel couldn't help shooting Oliver a glare. She was not about to let him off the hook so easily for cheating on her, not this time. No matter that Sara was alive, everything that had happened was still his fault. More, their hosts had implied that all of them had become involved with some crusade, it sounded like, of Oliver's. \_Not happening, \_she thought.

Sara felt her sister's tension and squeezed her arm, hoping to calm her.

For once, Felicity Smoak did not say anything, but her mind was on overdrive. \_Wonder what kind of technology this place has? Perhaps they'd let me try it out.\_

John Diggle had calmly listened and watched, taking in everything he saw and heard. The next few days would no doubt prove very interesting indeed.

Roy Harper glanced around, wondering what twist of fate had been kind enough to throw him in with these people.

Joe West eyes their hosts warily. He did not like the implications of what he was hearing - that himself and the others from Central City would become involved with the two missing Queen scions. \_Definitely not happening. \_He glanced at Barry, who was looking at the brothers in admiration, and sighed in resignation.

Iris West wondered how exactly she would get involved with the crowd from Starling and what it would mean for Central City in the future.

Henry Allen looked at the two brothers with a thoughtful expression. Was it possible that the man responsible for his wife's death was responsible for the sinking of the **\*\*Gambit\*\***? Though he didn't know it, it was true - in a way.

Barry Allen was both impressed and wary with Oliver and Matthew. Impressed because they were clearly committed to helping others, yet wary because he didn't know exactly what they were capable of. He could tell they would kill if necessary.

Caitlin Snow was suspicious, but decided that the best thing to do was watch and wait.

Ronnie Raymond took Caitlin's hand, seeing the tension in her face. He, too, was wrestling with thoughts of what this would mean for them. \_Is Cait dead? I hope not. \_Neither of them knew the truth was worse than anything they could imagine.

Martin Stein turned Hal Jordan's words over in his head, thinking. What the man had said did make sense. Messing with time was a tricky business, but this Justice League seemed confident it would all work out. He might be able to help the others see that this might be for the best.

Eddie Thawne wasn't too sure he wanted to be here at this moment, but their hosts had given him little choice. \_Might have to rethink transferring to the CCPD now, \_he mused.

Cisco Ramon was too awed by what he had seen to think much about the Justice Leaguers' words.

Ra's was already calculating how he would use what he learned here to his advantage. He glanced at his younger daughter's lover. Their introductions in the transporter room had been brief and clipped, but he could already tell that both the young man and his older brother

would make formidable assassins for the League - much like Al-Sa-Her. He turned his gaze to his former Horseman, who met his eyes and bowed his head briefly. Beside the Magician, a younger man - no doubt Al-Sa-Her's son - looked away from him, clearly uncomfortable. Soft, the boy was, not like Oliver and Matthew Queen. Ra's turned his attention back to Moira Queen's children, only to pause as he studied young Matthew again. Something about him seemed ... familiar. He looked at Thea Queen, standing next to her brother, and his eyes narrowed. Then it clicked and Ra's' lips twisted into a grim smile. This would be interesting to watch when the truth came out.

Nyssa eyed her younger siblings thoughtfully. It was obvious Talia was deeply in love with Matthew Queen. She judged that the boy had a spine and will of steel, no doubt inherited from his mother. He also had a dark presence to him that reminded her of many of her father's men, but his humanity was still there, though buried - it had not been stripped from him completely. She was uneasy, though. If her father approved of their relationship and decided to make Matthew Queen his heir, where would that leave her and Dusan? She glanced at her brother, but his face was unreadable, as always. Nyssa knew Dusan did not particularly care about the League's affairs in any case - his relationship with their father had been cold since the day of his birth. She had heard the whispers as a child - that her father had been disappointed Dusan was an albino and would not even grant him the title Son of the Demon. Despite their father's coldness she had always tried to watch out for and protect her younger siblings from his wrath.

"If you'll take seats, please, we can get started," Hal Jordan announced.

"Wait," Tommy interjected. "How long is this going to take? Some of us do have jobs, you know." He ignored the glares from his father, Laurel, and her father.

"You forget, Mr. Merlyn, that you were brought here through time. We can send you back the same way." Tommy flushed with embarrassment at his gaffe, but Clark Kent only winked at him.

Slowly everyone sat down, still trying to process what was happening. On the bottom row sat Walter, Moira with Robbie on her lap, Thea, Tommy, Diggle, Felicity, Laurel, and Quentin. Roy sat alone with an empty seat to either side of him, then Malcolm sat aloof at the other end of the row.

Clark Kent leaned close to Moira and said, "I know you would prefer young Robert stay with you for the time being, Mrs. Queen, but be warned there will be things in these recordings that may traumatize him. I suggest you do your best to shield him when necessary, but if it becomes too much, give him this." He handed her a glass of juice with a straw. Moira, Walter, Thea, Malcolm, and Tommy all gave him suspicious looks. Matthew stepped closer to the Kryptonian, his eyes dark with anger, but Kent merely reached back and twisted Matthew's hand in a firm grip. The only sound the teen made was a muffled grunt. "Easy, Matthew. I have no intention of harming your brother. The juice contains a mild sedative that will calm Robbie and let him sleep." Matthew gave the man a hard stare, then, realizing he was telling the truth, nodded grudgingly.

Joe, Iris, Barry, Henry, Ronnie, Caitlin, Cisco, Stein, and Eddie

Thawne took the second row. The two seats on Eddie's other side were empty, then Ra's sat directly behind Malcolm.

Refusing to sit with their families, Matthew, Talia, Dusan, Oliver, Sara, and Nyssa went to the fourth row, leaving the third row empty. Noticing this, Tommy and Thea were about to come sit with them, but Arthur Curry shook his head in warning. Tommy looked disappointed and Thea bit her lip, tears in her eyes, but both obeyed the unspoken request. Quentin glanced back at Sara before turning forward with his shoulders slumped.

Hal Jordan tapped his earpiece. \_"We're ready, Barbara."\_

\_"Acknowledged," \_she replied. The three Justice Leaguers took their places on the top row as the screen flickered to life once more.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) Yes, I know I said I wouldn't begin posting until after the season finales, but after the gut punch that was **Arrow 4x18**, **I** decided to go ahead and post at least the Prologue so you'd have something to read to tide you over until **4x19**. **Don't** expect the **Pilot** for a while, though. As for the fates of certain characters here? Well ... never say never. Though I will be following the basic outlines of **Arrow** **and** **The Flash**, **I'm** going to be putting my own spin on a LOT of things, so the only thing you can expect from this series is the unexpected, as the Prologue should make clear.

\_

\_2.) My deepest thanks to **changingdestiny40**, **Dantel01**, **Revenant-Commander**, **and** **Naitch03** **for** their help with this series.\_

\_3.) This fic series is based majorly on the **Arrowverse** (**CW's** **Arrow**, **CW's** **The Flash**, **CW's** **Legends of Tomorrow**, **CW Seed's** **Vixen**, **& NBC's** **Constantine**), **but** also blends elements, in part or in full, from the **DC** **Extended Universe** (**Man of Steel** **&** **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**); **the** **Dark Knight Saga** (**Batman Begins**, **The Dark Knight**, **&** **The Dark Knight Rises**); **the** **Batman** **comics** (**A Death in the Family**, **Under the Hood**, **The Killing Joke**, **Son of the Demon**, **&** **Birth of the Demon**); **&** the animated film **Batman: Under the Red Hood**. Naturally, I cannot claim ownership of any of these sources.\_

\_4.) The recordings shown to the viewing party will only cover Seasons 1 - 4 of **Arrow**, **Seasons 1 - 2** of **The Flash**, **&** the **Legends** **episode** **Star City 2046**. Do not ask me to make any other episodes part of the recordings.\_

\_5.) **Batman Begins** **and** **The Dark Knight** **take** place at the same time as the first two seasons of **Arrow**, **then** **The Dark Knight Rises** **takes** place in 2021. **Man of Steel** **takes** place in 2013.\_

\_6.) The actors listed beside each character are just to give a visual of how they might look. The twin boys who are listed for young **Robbie Queen** are the actors who played **George Crawley** in the

final two seasons of **Downton Abbey**. For the established **Arrowverse** characters who are still alive in 2033, the same actors are used, as the actors' ages were within a few years of the ages of the characters when **Arrow** began in 2012 and the verse has been moving along roughly in real time. However, there were a few characters, as you can see, who I couldn't decide on actors for. If anyone has any suggestions I would welcome them. For age reference, **Nora Allen** is 14 and **Sara Diggle** is 18.

\_7.) Middle names for a few characters have been made up so it will be easier for the viewing party (and readers) to distinguish between past and future selves.

\_8.) There are several characters who are not listed in the **Dramatis Personae** because to reveal them would be to spoil important parts of the story. Rest assured, I will reveal who they are in due time.

\_9.) The **Arrow** 2.5 comic series (not sure how canon it is) apparently established **Robert Queen's** middle name as **Alan**, thus the middle name given for **Robbie Queen**. By the way, while **Robbie** will be very much involved with the Justice League in the future, he will not be a masked vigilante like his older sister and brothers.

\_10.) Yes, the **League of Assassins** and the **League of Shadows** both exist in this 'verse, with one being a splinter group of the other. Which is which will be revealed later on. I know it may seem a little far-fetched, but I would say the existence of **Damien Dhark** and **HIVE** in **Arrow Season 4** adds a plausible air to it.

\_11.) The idea to make **Bruce Wayne** the cousin of **Oliver**, **Thea**, **Matthew**, and **Robbie** comes from the fact that **Martha Wayne** has blond hair in **Batman Begins**, so I decided to make her **Moirra's** older sister.

## 2. Episode I: Pilot

**\_2012\_**

Oliver and Matthew ran side by side through the dense forest, swinging from tree branches, ducking between the trunks, and leaping over vegetation and dead branches in their path. Both were breathing heavily. The forest began to thin out as a sheer rock cliff loomed ahead. They scaled it with ease and looked out at the fishing boat anchored in the bay. After observing the vessel for a moment they moved again, leaping nimbly over the rocks before jumping back to the ground. They ran back into the woods and reached their campsite a few minutes later. Matthew knelt and thrust a flint into the ground as Oliver retrieved his bow and an arrow. The arrowhead was already coated with tar; it took one scrape across the flint to set it afire. Oliver nocked the flaming arrow, drew back on the bowstring, and carefully adjusted his aim before letting the arrow fly -

directly into a pile of wood already stacked on the beach. A roar shattered the air as the wood burst into flame.

\* \* \*

><p>"Certainly better than your first attempt," Sara teased Oliver lightly. Oliver's lips twitched slightly in amusement. Quentin turned to look at his younger daughter, his eyebrows raised in disbelief and the question clear on his face. Sara shook her head, her expression saying, <em>Later. <em>Thankfully, it seemed her father got the hint, as he turned his attention back to the screen.

"You have excellent form, Oliver," Malcolm said, turning to look at the younger man. "I have something of an interest in archery myself. Your skill is quite impressive for only five years of training." Oliver inclined his head in acknowledgement, taking Malcolm's words for the compliment they appeared to be, not realizing there was a deeper meaning behind them. Malcolm caught Ra's' gaze as he turned back; the Demon's Head was watching him steadily. A shiver crept down Malcolm's spine, but he ignored it and focused his attention back on the recording.

Barry and Cisco whistled in admiration, then glanced back at the brothers with crimson faces. Matthew allowed a small smirk to twist his lips. He would enjoy needling them later.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Out on the water the fishermen spotted the bonfire and set their course for the island.<em>

\_'The name of the island they found us on is Lian Yu. It's Mandarin, for 'Purgatory'.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea shivered and Tommy reached for her hand to comfort her. She gave him a weak smile. Moira watched their interaction with pride, but also some worry. She had a feeling that one of the secrets to come out would be the twins' true parentage. It was the last thing she wanted to happen, but she would take that over Tommy possibly being attracted to Thea.<p>

Nearly everyone else felt a chill go down their spines at Oliver's words.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The fishermen reached the beach, walking past a tattered blue-and-gold mask hanging from a stake driven into the sand. An arrow was embedded in the right eye slit.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Sara coughed and looked at Oliver with a raised eyebrow. Matthew leaned forward and said in a low voice, "No matter what happened after, he was a good man at the beginning." He was about to say more when another voice interrupted him.<p>

"Ooh, nice mask," Cisco said.

"Cisco!" Matthew growled. The young man turned around ... and quailed at the dark looks coming from the six people behind him. \_What have I done now? \_he thought, and gulped nervously.



The others looked around on hearing Matthew's growl. "Is that ..."  
Barry said hesitantly.

"Slade's mask," Matthew replied icily. Barry stared at the teen, a shiver crawling down his spine at the dark look in the blue eyes, then wrenched his attention back to the screen.

Joe, Quentin, and Eddie eyed those in the fourth row with trepidation. Their reactions to Cisco's comment had set the cops on edge, wondering what further outbursts might set the clearly damaged young people off. Diggle, too, was concerned, though not as much as his fellow officers. As an ex-soldier, he knew well - more than the Detectives even - how PTSD affected people. He only hoped that while they were here the brothers, Sara Lance, and Ra's al Ghul's children could find someone to open up to.

"Let's go on," Hal Jordan said calmly.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'We've been stranded here for five years. We've dreamt of our rescue every cold, black night since then. For five years, we have had only one thought, one goal: survive.'<em>

\_The brothers fell to their knees as the astonished fishermen approached, pushing their hoods back. Both were ragged and filthy, with long hair and torn clothing. Oliver had a blond beard, while a faint shadow of dark stubble was visible on Matthew's cheeks and chin.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara nudged Oliver lightly in the ribs. "It's a good thing our hosts made you both shower and shave before you came in here, though I can't understand why you refused to cut your hair." Snickers came from Tommy and Thea in the front row and Barry and Cisco in the second row. Oliver's lips twitched as Dusan laughed. Matthew stared at Sara.<p>

"What's wrong with my hair?" he asked defensively. "Maybe I like it long."

Sara laughed. "I think long hair suits you, but short hair would look better. What do you think, Talia?"

"Oh, I like his hair long," Talia said with a smile. She leaned over and kissed Matthew lightly on the lips. "You're right, Sara. It does suit him - better than short hair." Matthew smiled and returned the kiss. Dusan snickered as Tommy made a gagging sound in the back of his throat and Thea muttered, "If you're going to do that, would you please get a room?" Quentin Lance rolled his eyes.

\* \* \*

><p><em> 'Survive and one day return home.'<em>

\_Once aboard the fishing boat, they sat with blankets around their shoulders as the crewman brought them hot drinks.\_

\_ 'The island held many dangers. To live, we had to make ourselves more than what we were, to forge ourselves into a weapon. We are returning ... not the boys who were shipwrecked but the men who will bring justice to those who have poisoned our city. ' Oliver glared at the island receding into the distance. 'My name is Oliver Queen.' \_

\_ Matthew looked up with a grim expression. 'My name is Matthew Queen.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Yikes, Ollie," Tommy said softly as he looked back at his friend.<p>

Moira felt a prickle of dread. From Oliver's words, it was obvious that Robert has hinted to him about the Undertaking before he died. The thought terrified her. If her sons started digging too deep they would find themselves in Malcolm's crosshairs, and she knew how ruthless his enforcer was.

Roy Harper grinned, prompting raised eyebrows from Thea, Laurel, and Detective Lance, but the young man did not bother to explain what was on his mind - that he thought the brothers' pursuit of justice meant bringing down the hardened criminals who infested the Glades.

Everyone else, except Malcolm, traded glances before looking at the brothers. Matthew stared straight ahead, his expression stony. Oliver, his eyes hooded, refused to meet anyone's gaze.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A news anchor opened the broadcast.<em>

\_ 'Oliver and Matthew Queen are alive,' the anchor announced. 'The Starling City residents were found by fishermen in the North China Sea five days ago.' A map of the area flashed briefly on the screen, followed by a photo of the brothers taken shortly before their disappearance. The anchor continued, 'Five years after they were missing and presumed dead following the accident at sea which claimed the ' \*\*Queen's Gambit\*\*'. ' A photo of the yacht was followed by video footage of a drunken Oliver tangling with paparazzi. 'Oliver Queen was a regular tabloid presence and a fixture at the Starling City club scene. Shortly before his disappearance, he was acquitted of assault charges stemming from a highly publicized drunken altercation with paparazzi.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. Oliver winced; he didn't need to be reminded of what a callow fool he had been then. "Honestly, Mom," he said as he leaned forward, "you and Dad probably should have let me go to jail instead of bailing me out. I let our family name shield me from the consequences of my actions when I needed a hard shock to get me to grow up." Moira looked at her eldest son and gave a slow nod. She knew Oliver was right. Glancing at her daughter, she resolved that if Thea broke the law again on their return, she would do as Oliver suggested.<p>

Thea squirmed nervously at the look her mother gave her. The only reason she managed to get out of trouble so far was because of her family name, but if that changed ...

Roy suppressed a snicker at the look on Thea's face. Oh, he would enjoy needling her later.

Lance could not believe he was hearing this from Oliver Queen. \_Maybe he has changed,\_ the cop thought reluctantly.

Joe West gave a small nod of approval at Oliver's words. That was one thing he had made clear to Iris once she was old enough to understand - she was not to use his status as a CCPD detective to get off the hook if she broke the law.

\* \* \*

><p><em>In quick succession single photos of Oliver, Matthew, and Robert flashed on the screen, followed by one of all three together. 'They are <em>\_the sons of Starling City billionaire Robert Queen, who was also on board but now officially confirmed as deceased.' A final photo of Robert Queen with '1958-2007' underneath it closed the broadcast.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirira closed her eyes. She had known, on seeing her sons, that her husband was dead, but to hear it confirmed was still a mild shock. Walter slipped an arm around her shoulders. His presence was reassuring. From the other end of the row Malcolm leaned forward and caught her eye, his expression one of mingled sorrow and guilt as he looked at her, then glanced at Robbie, who was nearly asleep. Moirira looked away from her lover, conflicting emotions roiling in her heart. She still despised Malcolm for sending Robert and nearly her boys to the depths of the ocean, but at the same time it had been impossible to deny what she felt for him. That was why they had renewed their relationship just four months before Robbie's birth.<p>

Thea whimpered and Tommy reached over to rub her back. "It's OK, Thea," he whispered, though he himself was shaken by the news of his surrogate father's death.

Caitlin stared at Moirira's stiff back as she tried to fathom what the older woman must be feeling. She couldn't imagine losing Ronnie the way Mrs. Queen had lost her husband. Ronnie gave her hand a gentle squeeze and she smiled wanly in return.

"I'm sorry, Moirira," Quentin said sincerely. "Robert was a good man."

"Thank you, Quentin," she replied.

\* \* \*

><p><em>It was night in Starling City. Oliver stood at the window of his private room in Starling General Hospital, staring without emotion at the city streets below. Matthew sat on the edge of the hospital bed behind Oliver. Both had showered and changed into fresh clothes in addition to receiving haircuts and shaves.<em>

\_Outside the room, Dr. Neil Lamb was speaking with Moira Queen. 'Twenty percent of Oliver's body is covered in scar tissue. Second-degree burns on his back and arms. X-rays show at least twelve fractures that never properly healed. Matthew has scars over fifteen percent of his body. Second-degree burns on his back, arms, and hands. Blunt trauma to the left side of his face. His left eye is permanently scarred.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira covered her mouth in horror. Thea had gone white as a sheet. God, what had her brothers been through in their five year exile? She turned and looked at her twin with tears in her eyes. Seeing her distress, Matthew stood and strode down the steps to the second row. Understanding what he wanted to do, Barry rose from his seat and stepped into the aisle to allow Matthew behind his sister. The aisle was far too narrow for him to kneel, so he merely stood behind Thea and rested his hands on her shoulders. "It's all right, Speedy," he said softly.<p>

Tommy could not even begin to comprehend what his surrogate brothers had gone through.

Walter stared grimly at the screen. He was internally glad that Robert was dead and had not had to witness the horrors his sons endured.

Quentin Lance felt his hatred for Oliver Queen starting to slip. No matter than Queen was still responsible for Sara being aboard the \*\*Gambit, \*\*he should not have had to go through such trauma. Nor should Matthew; the boy had been only twelve when the yacht went down. No wonder both of them were so cold now. He looked back at Matthew and felt a chill slither down his back as he saw the boy's scarred eye. \_Obviously a blow too close to his eye that caused bleeding, \_he thought.

Laurel was pale as she glanced back at Oliver, who met her gaze without flinching. She turned her attention to Sara, wondering what scars her sister might have, but Sara only gave her a sad smile.

"My God ..." Joe muttered, wincing at the doctor's description. Diggle and Eddie also winced; they were very familiar with the effects of torture as well.

Iris was crying softly. Barry stepped behind her and laid a hand on her shoulder. He glanced uneasily at both Joe and Henry as he did so, but neither man seemed inclined to chide him for comforting Iris.

Caitlin gripped Ronnie's hand tightly. She had seen people come into STAR Labs with deep physical scars before, but nothing of this magnitude.

Malcolm felt a sense of kinship with the brothers, for his time in the League had given him his own scars. Still ... "You said you weren't alone on Lian Yu," he said quietly. "Did Slade Wilson do this to you?"

"Some of it," Oliver replied. "There were ... others on the island

who were responsible as well."

"Who?" Laurel asked.

Matthew shook his head. "You'll likely find out soon."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira turned from observing her sons through the window.  
'Have they said anything about what happened?'<em>

\_Lamb shook his head. 'No. They've barely said anything.' Moira looked back into the room. 'Moira, I'd like you to prepare yourself. The sons you lost might not be the ones they found.'\_

\_She didn't reply, instead opening the door to enter the room as the doctor finished. Neither brother so much as moved as she closed the door behind her. 'Oliver. Matthew,' she said quietly. After a moment Oliver turned around and Matthew looked up.\_

\_'Mom,' Oliver finally said. Moira started toward him and Oliver met her halfway.\_

\_'Oh - my beautiful boy,' she said tearfully as she hugged him. Oliver returned it woodenly.\_

\_Matthew stood. 'Mom.' Moira released Oliver and pulled her younger son close, the tears running down her cheeks now.\_

\_'My baby.' Matthew closed his eyes.\_

\_After a moment Moira stepped back, wiping her eyes. 'Dr. Lamb said you'll both be discharged in the morning. Thea will be thrilled to hear you're coming home. But ...' she took a deep breath, aware that her sons were watching her intently. 'There's something I need to tell you now.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Robbie," Oliver said quietly. His mother met his eyes and nodded. "When did you find out?"<p>

"The end of September." Oliver nodded thoughtfully; it would have been about three weeks after the \*\*Gambit \*\*went down early in the month. "He was born three weeks early, though. Near the end of April." Moira looked down at her youngest; his head lolled against her shoulder and he blinked sleepily. "I was stunned when Dr. Gill told me. After losing you, Matthew, and your father, I never expected -" she had to pause for a second to regain her composure. "He's been a light in my life, but he could never replace either of you."

Oliver smiled softly as he rose and came down to the front row, leaning over his little brother to kiss him lightly on the forehead. Matthew, who still stood behind Thea, reached down and brushed Robbie's hand; the four year old curled his fingers around the teen's hand. The touching sight drew smiles from the others, even Ra's and Nyssa.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning the Bentley pulled up in front of the Queen mansion. The chauffeur got out and opened the trunk, revealing two long, padlocked wooden crates with Chinese markings on the sides. The man reached for them but was stopped by Oliver's hand on his arm. 'We<em>\_ 've got them.' The chauffeur obligingly stepped aside to allow the brothers to take the cases themselves.\_

\_Moira led her sons inside. 'Your rooms are exactly as you left them. I never had the heart to change a thing.'\_

\_Both brothers looked around the foyer, but we interrupted as Walter Steele entered. 'O\_\_liver. Matthew. \_\_It's damn good to see you both.' They set the cases down to shake hands with Walter, but did not seem to recognize him. Seeing their confusion, Walter clarified, 'It's Walter. Walter Steele.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Mom," Thea said, looking at Moira, "why did you tell them about Robbie, but not that you and Walter were married?" Moira grimaced.<p>

"Obviously I didn't want to overwhelm them, and telling them about your brother was more important."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You remember Walter, your father's friend from the company,' Moira added, laying a hand on Oliver's arm. Oliver gave Walter a searching look, then brushed past him to greet the maid who had just entered. Moira and Walter exchanged glances as Matthew followed his brother.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Felicity winced. "Ouch. Way to give him the cold shoulder, Mr. Queen." Oliver gave her a steady look and the blond woman flushed. Walter turned to his oldest stepson with a questioning look on his face.<p>

Oliver sighed and met Walter's gaze as he said, "It was probably because I wasn't expecting him to be at the house and hadn't fully accepted that he and Mom were married." Walter's eyebrows shot up and Moira stared at him in surprise. "Yes, Matt and I already knew before our hosts ever made the introductions. We've known for two years already."

"How?" Laurel interjected in astonishment.

"I'm sure you'll find out," Matthew deadpanned. Laurel looked like she wanted to press the issue, but Sara leaned forward and caught her sister's eye, shaking her head.

"Matthew is right," Hal Jordan said from the top row. "You will find out, but for now let's keep going." Everyone turned back to the screen, all wondering the same thing: how did the brothers know?

Malcolm had already guessed the answer - the brothers had obviously

returned to Starling at some point during their absence, but when? And why hadn't they tried to contact anyone? He glanced sideways at Moira. A suspicion had been taking root in his mind - it was likely that his and Moira's affair would be revealed, and how would her sons react if they had struggled with accepting Walter? More, if they found out he was responsible for Robert's death, would they accuse him of blackmailing her into sleeping with him?

Moira was plagued by similar fears. She worried that Oliver and Matthew would not believe her if she said that she had always felt an attraction to Malcolm even though she despised him. Thea wouldn't understand either. Even worse, if the truth about Thea and Matthew's parentage came out, what would her children think of her then?

\* \* \*

><p><em>'It's good to see you, Raisa,' Oliver said warmly as he took the maid's hands in his.<em>

\_'Welcome home, Mr. Oliver, Mr. Brandon,' she replied with equal warmth. A small smile twisted Matthew's lips - Raisa was the only one who had still called him regularly by his real name since he was six. 'Mr. Merlyn phoned,' Raisa added to Moira. 'He wants to join you for dinner.'\_

\_'Wonderful,' Moira said, but at that moment the sound of a door slamming upstairs caught the attention of both brothers. They looked up toward the second floor landing. 'Oliver? Matthew? Did you hear that?' They both ignored Moira, Matthew striding swiftly toward the foot of the stairs with Oliver right behind him.\_

\_'Hey, sis,' Matthew said as Thea appeared at the top of the stairs. She stood there for a second before running down to fling her arms around Matthew's neck.\_

\_'I knew it. I knew you were alive! I missed you both so much.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew smirked and lightly squeezed his twin's shoulder before returning to his seat beside Oliver.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver leaned in to slide an arm around his sister's shoulders. '<em>\_You were with us the whole time,' he said with a genuine smile on his face.\_

\_'Mama!' a child's voice shrieked. Oliver and Matthew stepped away from Thea as a four year old boy with blond hair and blue eyes, dressed simply in a polo shirt and jeans, ran into the foyer. The boy stopped short on seeing two strangers and backed up to stand beside Moira, reaching for her hand as his eyes darted back and forth between the two men. 'Mama, who are they?'\_

\_Matthew took a step forward, but Oliver stayed where he was, still stunned on seeing his little brother.\_

\_'It's all right, Robbie,' Moira said gently. 'It's your brothers, Oliver and Matthew. They've come home.'\_

\_Robbie looked up at his mother, then back at his older brothers. Matthew knelt where he was. 'Robbie?' The boy took a hesitant step forward, then another, before overcoming his shyness and running straight into Matthew's arms. Oliver and Thea joined them on the floor, all four siblings in one big hug as Moira, Walter, and Raisa looked on.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Aww, how sweet," Cisco said with a goofy grin on his face. Snickers came from Ronnie, Caitlin, Barry, Iris, and Roy. Most of the older adults smiled in amusement, though they knew Cisco was right.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Meanwhile at CNRI in the Glades Joanna De La Vega and Laurel Lance were in a terse discussion as the latter retrieved her mail. '<em>\_Come on, Laurel. We're lawyers, not miracle workers. We can't win this.'\_

\_ 'If we can't win a class-action suit against a man who swindled hundreds of people out of their homes and life savings,' Laurel replied as she flipped through the envelopes, 'then we're not fit to call ourselves a legal aid office.'\_

\_ 'And if we go bankrupt in the process, we won't be a legal aid office,' Joanna shot back as they went to their desks. 'Hunt has an army of lawyers, and they're ready to bury us.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin glared at his daughter. "Adam Hunt? Really?"<p>

Laurel sighed. "Dad, he's a scumbag. You know that. Everyone in Starling knows it."

"Typical rich people attitude," Roy scoffed, "stealing from those less fortunate." Malcolm shot the arrogant young man a barbed glare, but Roy wasn't cowed, instead sneering at the businessman.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Laurel paused and looked at her friend with a smirk. 'You and I against an army. I love those odds.'<em>

\_ 'Why do you hate me?' Joanna groused, folding her arms. Laurel scoffed and sat down at her desk as Joanna walked away. She leaned back in her chair and stared up at the bulletin board on Adam Hunt's 'alleged' criminal activities, searching for something concrete that she could sink her teeth into. A minute later a news report on TV broke through her musings.\_

\_ 'And in other news,' the anchor was saying, 'details as to the castaway story you've all heard about. The sons of a very wealthy billionaire will soon become a legendary story. Jessica now has more details and the complete castaway story. Jessica?' Laurel joined her colleagues in front of the TV as the reporter picked up.\_



\* \* \*

><p>Laurel pinched the bridge of her nose. "I have a feeling I'm not going to take this well," she muttered gloomily.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The <strong>Queen's Gambit<strong> was last heard from more than five years ago. Mr. Oliver Queen has reportedly confirmed he and his brother were the only survivors of the accident that took the lives of seven people, including local resident Sara Lance.' Laurel felt a chill crawl down her spine as Sara's photo flashed on the screen. 'Survived by her sister, Laurel -'\_

\_It was too much to bear. Laurel grabbed the remote and turned the TV off. All eyes turned to her, but she dropped the remote back on the table and walked away.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I hate that picture," Sara muttered savagely. Nyssa chuckled and gently squeezed Sara's arm.<p>

"It captured you well, beloved." A faint snort came from Dusan's direction, but the Heir to the Demon merely arched an eyebrow at her brother.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion that evening, Matthew emerged from his bathroom with a towel around his waist. Deep, livid scars were visible on his bare back and chest. He looked around his bedroom, at the sights which had once been familiar but now felt alien to him.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Thea sucked in a breath as she saw her twin's scars, the true magnitude of Dr. Lamb's words earlier now hitting home. Matthew heard her; outwardly he did not react, but inwardly he was disturbed.<p>

Caitlin studied the figure on the screen, noting the deep ridges of skin and the livid reddish tint to the stretched tissue around the scars. \_He might need to submit to a checkup to make certain none of the tissue is infected. I'll broach the topic with him later. Mr. Queen too, \_she thought.

\* \* \*

><p><em>In his own bedroom Oliver stood in front of a mirror, looking at his own scars. '<em>\_After five years, everything that was once familiar is now unrecognizable. The face I see in the mirror is a stranger.' At that moment a streak of lightning flashed outside and the shadows of two hooded men appeared briefly in the mirror, signifying the heroes the brothers would become. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin groaned in disgust, but a low warning whistle from Clark

Kent cut off anything he might have said. The cop turned and glowered at the Kryptonian, but chose to say nothing. The whistle had left his ears ringing and he didn't want to find out what might happen if he pushed his luck.<p>

Cisco, of course, picked that moment to say something that annoyed most of his fellow guests. "Actually, that looks kinda cool." Several dark glares were thrown his way and he shrank back.

Dr. Stein leaned forward to make eye contact with Cisco. "I would suggest," he advised quietly, "that you just watch for a while, Mr. Ramon. If you keep putting your foot in your mouth you will only make matters worse." Cisco and the other younger adults blinked at Stein in surprise, as it was the first time he had spoken since they entered the theater. Cisco gave the older man a subdued nod and slumped back in his seat.

\* \* \*

><p><em>As Oliver turned away, he recalled how it all began.<em>

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Queen's Gambit, in the North China Sea\_\*\*

\_The \*\*Queen's Gambit \*\*sailed through stormy seas. In the yacht's main cabin, Robert Queen turned from studying a radar map on the wall when a crewman entered, closing the door behind him against the storm's fury. '\_\_\_The storm's a category two,' the crewman said as he pushed the hood of his jacket back. 'The captain's recommending we head back.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Robert," Moira said softly. Walter, Quentin, and Nyssa all leaned forward, watching the screen with interest.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Robert sighed. 'All right. Inform the crew.' The crewman left as a cabin door opened and Matthew Queen - younger, unscarred - stumbled into the corridor, rubbing his eyes.<em>

\_ 'I can't sleep, Dad.' \_

\_Robert knelt and put his arms around his younger son as Oliver came out of his own stateroom. '\_\_\_Are we in trouble?'\_

\_ 'One of us is.' Robert replied to his elder son's question. Just then Sara Lance ducked out of Oliver's stateroom in nothing more than her lingerie and a short silk robe.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara winced and her father scowled in disapproval as Barry, Tommy, and Eddie all wolf whistled. Henry Allen gave his son a stern glare. "That was completely inappropriate, Barry."<p>

"Sorry," Barry muttered, abashed. Tommy was on the receiving end of similar expressions from his father and Laurel.

Quentin's lips thinned, but he said, "Just don't do it again, Mr. Allen. I'm not afraid to use a Taser if I have to." Joe had to suppress a chuckle at his fellow cop's protectiveness; he was much the same way with Iris.

"Dad ..." Sara muttered in embarrassment; she had a pretty good idea what he meant by that remark.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Ollie?' Noticing Robert and Matthew, she wrapped the robe around herself. 'Where do you keep the bottle opener on this thing?'<em>

\_ 'I'll be there in a minute, Sara,' Oliver said with a grin. Sara returned his smile and ducked back into the cabin.\_

\_Robert released Matthew and went to Oliver, laying a hand on the younger man's shoulder, the other against his chest. 'You know, son, that is not going to finish well for either of them or for you,' he advised softly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Neither Malcolm or Moira could hide their disbelief at Robert's words. Joe's eyes narrowed. Obviously Robert Queen had been a womanizer and his eldest son was the same. <em>Is nothing ever simple with the rich? <em>he wondered.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>\*\*

\_Oliver stood in the foyer, now dressed for dinner. He stared pensively at a childhood photo of himself with his father. Behind him the front door opened and a familiar voice drawled, 'W\_\_hat did I tell you? Yachts suck.' The newcomer laughed.\_

\_With a smile Oliver turned to his friend. 'Tommy Merlyn.' They embraced each other.\_

\_ 'I missed you, buddy,' Tommy said.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tommy turned to look at his friend with a smile that Oliver returned.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What about me?' Matthew asked in mild amusement as he came down the stairs with Thea. Tommy laughed and released Oliver to hug Matthew. After a moment he stepped back, looking the teen up and down.<em>

\_ 'Not the kid brother any more. You've grown up.' A ghost of a smile flickered across Matthew's face.\_

\_ 'Tommy!' Robbie barreled into the foyer and wrapped his arms around

Tommy's legs. Tommy laughed and swung the boy onto his back; Robbie squealed in delight as he grasped Tommy's shirt. Moira laughed as she and Walter entered the foyer together.\_

\_ 'Robbie never gets tired of that,' she said fondly. Matthew and Oliver both turned away, trying to bury their feelings deep down, but Tommy noticed and his smile faded.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oliver, I -" Tommy started, but Matthew cut him off.<p>

"We can discuss this later, Tommy." Tommy looked uncertainly back and forth between the brothers, but finally nodded and returned his attention to the screen.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few minutes later they were all seated around the dining room table. Oliver sat at the head with Matthew and Tommy on his right, Thea and Robbie on his left. Moira faced her eldest son at the other end with Walter to her right.<em>

\_ 'OK. What else did you miss? Super Bowl winners: Giants, Steelers, Saints, Packers, Giants again. A black president, that's new. Oh, and \*\*'Lost,'\*\* they were all dead ... I think.' Tommy frowned in confusion. Oliver had listened politely to his friend, but Matthew was distracted, his attention on his mother and Walter.\_

\_ 'What was it like there?' Thea asked suddenly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Several eyebrows rose at this, but the older adults recalled all too well how insensitive teenagers could be to others, absorbed as they were in their own little worlds. Oliver and Matthew stared at their sister in disbelief.<p>

Caitlin was not as quiet as the others. "Perfect timing, Miss Queen," she remarked. "Your brothers just came home and you're already asking them questions about the island? That is not very smart." The girl flushed scarlet as Moira glared at Caitlin. Ronnie snickered as he saw Cait was completely unfazed by the older woman's expression.

Moira turned her glare on Ronnie, but he only shrugged and said, "Cait has a point, Mrs. Queen. Your daughter should have thought that one through before she said anything." Fuming, Moira turned back to the front.

Walter said quietly, "Calm down, Moira." She settled back in her chair, but inwardly continued to stew.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Silence fell as the adults turned to look at the brothers. Matthew stiffened in his chair as Oliver stared at Thea with a false smile. Only Robbie was oblivious to the tension as he continued to eat. 'Cold,' Oliver said after a moment, an air of finality in the word.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oooh," Barry muttered. "Well played, Oliver."<p>

"Yeah," Oliver said. He shot a glare at his sister, who avoided looking his way.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Tomorrow, you and me, we're doing the city,' Tommy said suddenly, sensing that it was time to move on. 'You've got a lot to catch up on. You too, Matt.'<em>

\_'That sounds like a great idea,' Moira interjected.\_

\_Matthew shook his head. 'Thanks, Tommy, but I'm not ready for that yet.'\_

\_Tommy frowned, but before he could say anything Oliver said, 'Good. Then I was hoping to swing by the office.'\_

\_Moira and Walter both looked startled, Walter taking a hasty sip from his wine glass before setting it down. 'Well, there's plenty of time for all that. Queen Consolidated isn't going anywhere.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Caitlin turned to look at Oliver with narrowed eyes. "You're lying, Mr. Queen."<p>

Oliver returned her look coolly. "No doubt I am, Dr. Snow."

"Oliver -" Moira started.

"No, Mom," he said sharply. "You're not going to try to push me into taking a position at the company. Forget it."

"You are the oldest son," she snapped in frustration. "You were meant to be the next CEO."

"No, I wasn't," Oliver retorted. "Dad knew that. Why do you think he started taking Matthew to the office so much?"

"You can settle this later," Clark Kent reminded them.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At that moment Raisa came back into the room with a bowl of pears. She tripped on the rug and stumbled into Oliver, who deftly caught her and the bowl without standing. 'Oh, I am so sorry, Mr. Oliver,' she apologized. Oliver smiled reassuringly at her.<em>

\_'It's no worry,' he replied in Russian. Tommy and Raisa both stared at him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Several eyebrows shot up. "You speak Russian?" Tommy exclaimed,

flabbergasted. Laughter drifted down from the top row and Tommy glared at their hosts. "What's so funny?" he asked crossly.<p>

"Oh, you'll see," Hal Jordan replied, his eyes twinkling.

"Anatoly?" Sara said quietly.

"Yes," Matthew said just as quietly, but Malcolm heard him.  
\_Interesting, \_he mused.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Dude, you speak Russian?' Tommy finally exclaimed. Moira eyed Oliver at that.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Laughter came from the three Justice Leaguers once again. Tommy shook his head in resignation. "Great. Just great," he grumbled. Barry, Iris, Ronnie, Caitlin, Felicity, Roy, and Thea all looked amused at Tommy's discomfort.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I didn't realize you took Russian at college, Oliver,' Walter said, his confusion showing.<em>

\_ 'I didn't realize you wanted to sleep with my mother, Walter,' Oliver replied bluntly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Felicity groaned. "Nice job, Oliver." Tommy snorted derisively.<p>

"Oliver doesn't shy away from blunt statements like that," he told her.

Barry muttered, "I'd likely have my ears pinched off if I said something like that."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Silence fell once more. <em>\_Walter and Moira glanced at each other. Moira looked back at her sons, whose faces showed only polite interest, no anger or disappointment, before turning to her daughter.\_

\_ 'I didn't say anything,' Thea protested. Tommy pressed his lips together.\_

\_ 'She didn't have to,' Matthew added.\_

\_Moira's eyes narrowed, then she nodded, apparently reaching a decision. 'Oliver, Matthew,' she said, taking Walter's hand in hers, 'Walter and I are married, and I don't want you to think that either one of us did anything to disrespect your father.'\_

\_ 'We both believed that Robert, like you, was, uh, well - gone,' Walter added.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"We know you wouldn't, Mom," Matthew said, leaning forward as Moira turned to meet his eyes. Oliver only nodded. "We're glad you found happiness with Walter. You could never do anything to disrespect Dad's memory."<p>

Moira kept the smile on her face, but inwardly she winced. From the corner of her eye she saw Malcolm's expression and knew he was having similar thoughts.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew gave them a pained smile as Oliver said, '<em>\_It's fine.' After a moment Matthew rose. \_

\_ 'May I be excused?' he asked quietly. Moira nodded and Matthew strode from the room, pausing briefly to ruffle Robbie's hair. The four year old looked up at his older brother with a smile that Matthew returned. Oliver stood and plucked a pear from the fruit bowl.\_

\_ 'Hey, don't forget about tomorrow, buddy,' Tommy said, clasping Oliver's arm as he walked by. Oliver touched Tommy's shoulder before continuing out of the room, not seeing the looks on his mother and sister's faces.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I noticed you didn't eat much dinner," Thea said suddenly.<p>

"They wouldn't be used to normal fare like that anymore," Caitlin reminded her.

"Oh, right," Thea muttered, her face flaming.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later that night, as the storm raged outside the mansion, both brothers slept fitfully on the floor of Oliver's bedroom before the open windows as the driving rain pelted them.<em>

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Queen's Gambit, in the North China Sea\_\*\*

\_Sara sprawled on the bed in Oliver's cabin with a glass in her hand, counting, as Oliver opened a bottle of wine. '\_\_\_One, two, three, four. It's getting closer,' Sara said. The cabin lights flickered on and off.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew cursed loud enough for everyone in the theater to hear. Talia reached over to stroke the back of his neck; the feel of her cool fingers against his skin was a comfort. Dusan laid a reassuring hand on the younger man's shoulder.<p>

Oliver's reaction was more subdued, but he still gripped his chair

arms hard.

Nyssa wrapped an arm around Sara as the younger woman stiffened and whispered, "It's all right, beloved."

Everyone in front of them had gone rigid on hearing Matthew's voice, realizing what was about to happen. Moira steeled herself for what she was going to see; it had been at her urging, after all, that Robert had challenged Malcolm. Thea stared at the screen fearfully, not certain she wanted to see her father die. Tommy's breath hitched in his chest. Malcolm, on the other hand, watched with a dispassionate expression, though a prickle of guilt lingered at the back of his mind. He glanced at the sleeping boy on Moira's lap and hoped he wouldn't wake. It would not bode well if he did.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'That's not very scientific,' Oliver said teasingly.<em>

\_'What would you know about science, Mr. Ivy league dropout?' she asked as he finished pouring his wine and came to the bed.\_

\_'I happen to know a lot about science,' Oliver said. He took a sip of wine before setting the glass on the nightstand, then seated himself on the bed. 'I know about fermentation. I know biology.' He leaned forward and kissed her. A second later they pulled apart and Sara leaned back with a smile.\_

\_'Laurel's gonna kill me,' she said as she set her glass beside Oliver's. 'Oh, she's so gonna kill me.'\_

\_'Your sister will never know,' Oliver reassured her. He pushed her back onto the mattress and climbed on top of her. 'Come here.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ugh," Thea groaned. Laurel shot a glare at Sara, who shrugged guiltily. Barry, Iris, and Roy looked uncomfortable. Quentin glared daggers at Oliver, but the younger man seemed unaffected by the cop's ire.<p>

Matthew couldn't help an amused snicker, despite the gravity of the situation playing out on the screen. Lance turned his glare on the teen, but Matthew only shrugged before his expression shuttered once more.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Sara laughed and they kissed again. Suddenly there was a loud crack of thunder and Sara pulled away in a panic. 'OK, that one was really close,' she said nervously.<em>

\_'Sara,' Oliver said with a grin, 'we're gonna be fine.'\_

\_'Abruptly the yacht tilted, sending the champagne glasses and the two lovers flying. Sara screamed. Oliver managed to catch himself on the edge of the bed and pull himself to his knees. '\_\_\_Sara?' He looked around and saw her lying across the room near the door, bleeding from a cut on her forehead. She blinked in confusion, then looked up at



Oliver and reached for him -\_

\_With a roar the ocean water surged into the cabin, sweeping Sara away as she screamed. 'S\_\_ara!' Oliver shouted. A second later he too was in the surging ocean. He fought his way to the surface, \_\_gasping for breath, and looked around frantically. 'Sara!'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel gasped and her father swore roundly. Sara closed her eyes as the memories assailed her, leaning back into Nyssa's comforting touch. Iris's eyes glistened and Caitlin had gone pale.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oliver!' a voice called.<em>

\_ 'Sara?!' He heard nothing; the storm's fury was too great.\_

\_ 'Oliver!' the voice shouted again. He looked around and saw the \*\*Gambit \*\*life raft floating in the rough swells. He swam for it and his father and a crewman pulled him aboard. Matthew was there too, shivering in his wet clothes, his face stark white and his eyes wide with fear. \_

\_Oliver coughed and lunged for the side of the raft, intending to jump back in the water to search for Sara, but his father held him back. '\_\_\_No! Dad, she's out there!'\_

\_ 'She's not there, Oliver.'\_

\_ 'Sara!' Oliver screamed. He could only watch helplessly as the \*\*Gambit \*\*slipped beneath the surface.\_

\_ 'She's gone.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Stop!" Oliver suddenly demanded, leaning forward intently. Hal Jordan immediately signaled the control room to pause the recording as Oliver studied the screen for a moment before he rose and came down the steps to the main floor. He tilted his head back to look at the frozen image. By now Matthew and Sara had joined him, with the al Ghul siblings standing behind the trio.<p>

Matthew's breath hissed between his teeth. "Sabotage." The single word sent a chill through the hearts of everyone in the room except Moira and Malcolm.

"How can you be certain?" Eddie asked.

"Look at the way the bow was dragged down, Detective Thawne," Oliver replied, gesturing to the screen. "All this time I thought the storm had flooded the bow, but it was impossible for that to happen. We've had plenty of experience with ships since the \*\*Gambit, \*\*one a freighter that was sunk. There's no doubt - the \*\*Gambit \*\*was sabotaged. The question is: who was responsible for it?" Ice slid into his tone as he glared at their hosts.

"Calm yourself, Oliver," Arthur Curry said quietly. "You'll have your answers soon enough." The brothers and Sara all glowered at him, but he offered nothing more.

After a moment Matthew broke the deafening silence that had fallen in the room. "After Dad saw me back to bed, I wasn't asleep long - maybe five minutes - before I felt the bed shake and heard a roar close by. There was barely enough time for Dad and Gus to throw the life raft overboard before the water rushed in. I had to jump for it and the suction pulled me under." He closed his eyes as he recalled thrashing frantically in the ocean, trying to reach the surface, the water choking him as it rushed into his mouth and nose. "If Dad hadn't jumped in after me and grabbed my arm, I would have drowned."

Tears trickled down Moira's cheeks as she listened to her younger son describe what had happened. Knowing that he had nearly died - would have died if not for Robert's swift action - chilled her to the bone. Malcolm kept his face impassive, but inside he was shaken by what he heard. Tommy was white faced and had an arm around Thea as she cried into his shoulder.

Quentin swore silently as he listened to Matthew. Laurel had a hand over her mouth and a look of horror in her eyes.

Joe wrapped an arm around Iris, keeping a stoic expression on his face even though he wanted to weep. Like Robert Queen, he would do anything to protect his daughter and foster son, but he could not imagine either of them enduring the horrors the brothers had. He glanced at Barry and Henry. Barry looked pensive, the usual cheerful look in his eyes gone. Henry laid a hand on his son's shoulder, his own expression grim. Cisco looked subdued; Caitlin's expression was unreadable, but her grip on Ronnie's hand was tight. Eddie mused bitterly that his own father would not have bothered to make sure he was safe. Dr. Stein closed his eyes, sorrow flooding him as he listened.

After allowing the viewers a few minutes to compose themselves, Clark Kent signaled for the recording to resume.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>\*&#x2D;&#x2D;

\_Moira leaned over Oliver, shaking him lightly. 'Oliver, wake up,' she said loudly, trying to be heard over the storm. She shook him again. 'Oliver ...'\_

\_Startled awake, both brothers instantly went into action. \_\_Oliver grabbed his mother's arm and flipped her over him onto the floor, his hand coming down across her neck. Matthew glared as he moved to Oliver's side, his posture tense.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Iris, Thea, Felicity, and Laurel all gasped. Sara and Nyssa, however, were not surprised, as similar incidents had happened to them before. Moira was shocked and made a note never to wake her sons in that manner. Walter, Barry, Henry, Ronnie, Tommy, and Cisco winced.<p>

Diggle and the cops knew that the brothers had severe PTSD issues and their reactions to being woken confirmed it. The ex soldier decided to see if perhaps one of his old therapists could be persuaded to speak with Oliver and Matthew. \_I doubt they'd be willing to open up to Dr. Snow, \_he mused.

Caitlin was thinking along similar lines, though she hoped to draw the brothers out of their shells herself.

\* \* \*

><p><em> 'Oliver!' Walter shouted.<em>

\_Oliver looked at Walter, then down at his mother. He released her and scrambled back to the window. Matthew hung his head. 'I'm sorry. I'm so - I'm so sorry,' Oliver muttered ashamedly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira shook her head. "You have nothing to be sorry for, either of you," she said, turning to look at her sons. Oliver's stiff posture relaxed and a ghost of a smile appeared on his lips.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira coughed as Walter helped her up. They both knelt where they were, not coming any closer. '<em>\_No, its OK, Oliver,' she said soothingly. 'It's all right, sweetheart. You're home. You're home.'\_

\_ 'Mama?' Robbie's tousled head appeared around the door.\_

\_ 'It's nothing, Robbie. Oliver had a nightmare, that's all,' Walter said quickly, going to his youngest stepson. 'You should be in bed. Come on.' He was about to pick Robbie up when Matthew stopped him.\_

\_ 'Wait. I'll take him.' Walter eyed the teen for a long moment, then relented. Matthew took Robbie's hand and together they left Oliver's bedroom.\_

\_After settling Robbie in bed and sitting with him until he fell asleep, Matthew went back to his room, but paused before reaching the door. He didn't really want to sleep alone tonight. Spinning on his heel, he headed back down the hall to Thea's room and slipped inside. 'Thea,' he said quietly. She stirred but didn't wake. 'Thea,' he said more loudly, lightly shaking her shoulder. Her eyes flew open and he clapped a hand over her mouth before she could scream. 'It's only me.' He briefly flicked the bedside lamp on so she could see his face. \_

\_Thea sat up in bed and pulled the blanket around her shoulders. 'What's wrong, Matt?'\_

\_He sighed. 'I can't sleep. Nightmares.'\_

\_ 'Stay with me tonight,' Thea suggested. 'Do you remember how we used to sleep in the same bed if one of us had nightmares?'\_

\_ 'I do.' He paused. 'Mom wouldn't like it, but frankly I don't care.

I've missed you, Thea.'\_

\_Thea threw back the covers to allow Matthew to climb into the bed. With a sigh he turned on his side. Thea wrapped her arms around him and in less than five minutes both twins were fast asleep.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I would have objected, but you're right, Thea - you always slept better after nightmares when you were in the same bed." Moira gave the twins a wry look. "Just don't do it too often." They both nodded, understanding that she was giving them permission to do so here if necessary.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning Oliver retrieved his munitions crate from under his bed, unlocked it, and raised the lid. He picked up the small, worn notebook on top and set it aside before taking an arrowhead-shaped stone. <em>

\_In Thea's room, she leaned on her desk watching her friend Margo crush a pill into powder with the edge of a credit card.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira and Walter both glared at Thea, who shrank back in her seat and averted her gaze from everyone. Tommy pressed his lips together and shook his head. Caitlin wondered just how screwed up the girl was that she had turned to drugs. Obviously she needed a therapist's help. <em>A lot. Just how badly did Mrs. Queen fail Thea?<em>

Quentin Lance was not at all surprised that the teen was still into drugs; he vaguely remembered she had been at Merlyn Jr's birthday party two years before, when that drug dealer wound up dead. \_Let's hope Robbie doesn't take after his sister. Perhaps with Mr. Steele around he'll have a more normal life, \_the cop thought.

Iris shook her head in disbelief at Thea's cavalier attitude, knowing her own father would have grounded her for weeks if he caught her with drugs.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Where did you get these?' Thea asked with a smile.<em>

\_ 'Roxies. Thank you, Daddy's ACL tear,' Margo replied smugly. A knock came at the door and the girls scrambled to hide the pills and the powder, barely managing it before Oliver entered the room.\_

\_ 'Ollie,' Thea said with a smile.\_

\_Oliver winced, but replied, 'No one's called me that in a while, Speedy.' Thea closed her eyes, both annoyed and embarrassed.\_

\_ 'Worst nickname ever.'\_

\_ 'What, always chasing after me as a kid? I thought it fit pretty well. Maybe it still does.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver snorted and said, "Your quickness obviously didn't fool me, Thea. I have excellent hearing now." Thea glared at him as Matthew pursed his lips in disapproval.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Taking her cue to leave, Margo grabbed her bag. 'See you at school, Speedy.' She threw a grin over her shoulder at Thea as she left. Once her friend was gone, Thea laughed.<em>

\_ 'Sorry about her.' \_

\_ 'I have something for you.' Oliver took the stone from his pocket and held it up. Thea smiled in amazement.\_

\_ 'You did not come back from a deserted island with a souvenir.' \_

\_ 'It's a Hozen,' Oliver told her. 'And in Buddhism, it symbolizes reconnecting. I kept it in hopes that one day, it would reconnect me with you.' He handed the Hozen to his sister.\_

\_ 'A rock! That is sweet,' a voice said from the doorway. Oliver smiled as Tommy entered the room. 'You know, I want one of those t-shirts that says 'My friend was a castaway, and all I got was this crappy shirt'.' Tommy laughed.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm snorted disdainfully at his son's carefree attitude. Tommy heard and glared at his father. "Don't give me that look, Tommy. Your party boy lifestyle is beginning to wear thin. You need to grow up," he said archly.<p>

"Maybe I like my lifestyle," the younger Merlyn snapped.

\_ You won't be enjoying it for much longer, \_Malcolm thought. He decided that if these viewings did not show Tommy acting more like an adult, he would definitely put his plan into motion earlier when they returned.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea smiled at his antics, then looked at her brother. 'Don't let him get you into too much trouble,' she advised. 'You just got back. Take it slow.' She embraced Oliver, who gave her a kiss on the cheek.<em>

\_ Faking a cough, Tommy announced, 'Ahem. The city awaits.' He gave Thea a smile and the two friends left the room. Once out in the hall, Tommy jerked a hand back toward Thea's door. 'Have you noticed how hot your sister's gotten?' he asked. Oliver glared at him. 'Because I have not,' Tommy finished, walking hastily ahead of his friend.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira, Walter, Malcolm, Oliver, and Matthew all glared at Tommy, who winced. Thea's cheeks turned pink. Everyone else looked disgusted.<p>

Barry's eyes widened at Tommy's gall. \_Ooh, he's gonna be in for it now, \_the younger man thought.

Malcolm said sharply, "Really, Tommy. Talking like that about a girl who's not even an adult yet?"

Tommy flushed, knowing that his father was right. Thea looked uncomfortable and Moira shook her head, knowing Tommy's embarrassment would only get worse if he learned that Thea was really his half sister.

Ra's eyed the two young people keenly. He had already guessed, of course, that young Thomas was the twins' older half brother, but was somewhat surprised that Al-Sa-Her had not made the connection yet. \_He will before long, I'm sure.\_ From the corner of his eye the Demon's Head saw his eldest daughter looking back and forth between young Merlyn and Thea and knew she had seen the slight resemblance between the two. Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A short time later the two friends were driving through the Glades with Tommy at the wheel of the Mercedes and the radio blaring.<em>

\_Your funeral blew,' Tommy said. \_\_Oliver looked at him with a grin.  
\_

\_Did you get lucky?' he asked, and they both laughed.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin Lance groaned in disgust. "By all means, Merlyn, whatever plan you're cooking up to make Tommy take some responsibility in his life, continue it," he said irritably. Tommy glowered at the Detective.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Fish in a barrel,' Tommy said. 'They were so sad ...'<em>

\_No,' Oliver mock groaned.\_

\_ ... and huggy,' Tommy continued. 'And I am counting on another target rich environment for your welcome home bash.'\_

\_Oliver looked at his friend in confusion. 'At my what?'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, this will end well," Eddie deadpanned. Ronnie snickered at the cop's bluntness.<p>

Roy snapped, "Do you realize what a creep you sound like, Merlyn? It doesn't surprise me one bit." Malcolm sneered at Roy, but the young man was not cowed, matching Malcolm's sneer with one of his own. Ra's and Nyssa were both impressed at how Roy stood up to Al-Sa-Her. The Demon's Head mused, \_Young Harper would make an excellent assassin. He already has the will, he just needs guidance.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You came back from the dead,' Tommy reminded him. 'This calls for a party. You tell me where and when. I'll take care of everything.' He made a turn and stopped at the corner. Across the road was a dilapidated building, with several homeless people out front standing close to a warming barrel. On their side of the street stood an old, abandoned steel mill - the Queen steel mill. 'And this city's gone to crap,' Tommy continued. 'Your dad sold his factory just in time. Why'd you want to drive through this neighborhood anyway?'<em>

\_Oliver looked out his window at the abandoned building, the words \*\*Queen Industrial\*\* barely visible at the front, and muttered, 'No reason.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Liar," Thea chirped, giving Oliver a mocking grin. He glowered at her for a moment before shaking his head resignedly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'So what'd you miss the most?' Tommy asked, turning to Oliver with a grin. 'Steaks at the Palm, drinks at the station, meaningless sex?'<em>

\_ 'Laurel.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Of course," Quentin muttered. Sara was mildly amused at the disbelieving look on her older sister's face.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Tommy sobered instantly. 'Everyone is happy you're alive. You want to see the one person who isn't?'<em>

\_Oliver gave him a calm stare. \_

\_ 'All right,' Tommy said with a sigh. 'But don't say I didn't warn you.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Disaster in the making," Ronnie remarked. Caitlin nodded in agreement.<p>

Laurel glowered at the couple before turning to their hosts. "Do you have to show this?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Lance," Arthur Curry said calmly. Laurel huffed and

settled back in her seat. Roy, Barry, and Cisco were not even trying to hide their amusement at her ire.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At CNRI Joanna beckoned to Laurel. 'Laurel, I just got this from Hunt's lawyers.' She handed Laurel a thin blue folder. 'They filed a change of venue. We are now in front of Judge Grell.'<em>

\_'Hunt funded Grell's reelection campaign,' Laurel mused as she headed for her desk, flipping through the folder. Joanna kept pace with her.\_

\_'Mm-hmm.'\_

\_'He's got Grell in his back pocket,' Laurel stated as she handed the folder back.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Slimeball," Roy spat with surprising venom. "He sent several of my friends to prison when the evidence pointed to them being innocent. They all got stiff sentences. Some of them are in Iron Heights." He glanced at Henry Allen, who nodded grimly.<p>

"I've crossed paths with a few of those young men," Henry replied. "So far they've managed to stay alive, but Iron Heights has quite a rough crowd." He looked at Laurel. "No doubt you're well aware of the dangers, Miss Lance, but I caution you: be careful." Laurel nodded soberly.

"I never liked Grell," Walter remarked. "He always struck me as a man who only cared about lining his own pockets. I definitely won't be making any contributions if he runs for reelection."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Joanna slipped an arm around Laurel's shoulders. 'You know, it's fun being your friend,' she said smugly. 'I get to say 'I told you so' a lot.'<em>

\_'No.' Laurel shook her head. 'Adam Hunt is not smarter than we are.'\_

\_'No, he's just richer and willing to commit multiple felonies,' Joanna shot back. Oliver looked over at them from where he stood next to Laurel's desk.\_

\_'We don't need to go outside the law -' Laurel started, wagging a finger as she turned to face her friend.\_

\_'To find justice,' Joanna finished. 'Your dad's favorite jingle.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Still the truth," Quentin muttered. Joe and Eddie were not so sure now.<p>



Tommy scoffed. "You're just sore Oliver and Matthew might start succeeding where you and the police failed."

"Watch your mouth, Merlyn," the cop warned, "or the next time you're hauled in you won't be let off so easily."

"Enough!" Hal Jordan snapped, cutting the brewing argument short.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Joanna smiled and walked away, and Laurel turned around  
<em>

\_ - to see Oliver Queen standing by her desk, looking at the board on Adam Hunt. He looked at her and smiled slightly even as her own smile faded. 'Hello, Laurel,' he said quietly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel groaned and dropped her head into her hands.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em> The two left CNRI and walked through an outdoor plaza. 'You went to law school,' Oliver said. 'You said you would.'<em>

\_ 'Yeah,' Laurel said sullenly. 'Everyone's proud.'\_

\_ 'Adam Hunt's a heavy hitter,' Oliver said. 'You sure you want to get in the ring with him?'\_

\_ 'Five years and you want to talk about Adam Hunt?' she snapped. Oliver shook his head.\_

\_ 'No. Not really.' Laurel sighed and stopped, Oliver turning to face her.\_

\_ 'Why are you here, Ollie?' she asked wearily.\_

\_ 'To apologize,' he replied immediately. 'It was my fault. I wanted to ask you not to blame her.'\_

\_ 'For what?' she asked. 'Falling under your spell? How could I possibly blame her for doing the same things that I did?'\_

\_ 'I never meant to -'\_

\_ Laurel didn't let him finish. 'She was my sister. I couldn't be angry because she was dead. I couldn't grieve because I was so angry. That's what happens when your sister dies while screwing your boyfriend.' She paused, trying to regain her composure. 'We buried an empty coffin,' she finally said, 'because her body was at the bottom of the ocean - where you left her. It should have been you.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ollie, Sara, I'm sorry," Laurel said, turning to look at her sister and former lover. "I shouldn't have been such a bitch."<p>

Sara shook her head. "You were being a bitch, Laurel - but as far as you knew I was dead. You had every right to be angry at Ollie, but the blame wasn't all his. I deliberately chose to go on the **\*\*Gambit\*\***. You're at fault too." Laurel looked like she had been slapped. Sara continued, "He told me about your suggestion that you move into an apartment together. Did you not even notice he wasn't enthused about it? He was sending a message to you that he wasn't ready, but you had to have things your own way." Sara leaned back in her chair as Laurel tried to think of something to say, but couldn't.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver looked pained, the truth of her words stinging. 'I know that it's too late to say this, but I'm sorry,' he said at last.<em>

\_'Yeah, I'm sorry, too,' Laurel said acidly. 'I'm thrilled Matthew is home, Ollie, but you - I'd hoped that you'd rot in hell a whole lot longer than five years.' She stalked past him back in the direction of CNRI. 'How did you think that was gonna go, Tommy?' she hissed as she passed the Merlyn heir.\_

\_'About like that,' he replied as he looked after her.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel groaned again and rubbed her forehead, ignoring the hard look Caitlin gave her. Iris was stunned at Laurel's attitude; obviously the older woman had serious issues with Oliver and her sister.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Not long after Tommy and Oliver headed back to the alley where Tommy had parked his car. 'OK, so we took care of that,' Tommy said. 'Good call. Now we can make up for lost time. If you're not too sick of fish, I suggest we find some leggy models and eat sushi all day. What do you say?' A van abruptly roared up behind them out of nowhere, the driver slamming on the brakes before he hit the two friends.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Not good, not good," Cisco muttered. Malcolm gripped the arms of his chair so hard the leather creaked, wondering who had sent the men that were obviously about to attack his son and Oliver. He glanced at Moira, but she shook her head, letting him know that she had no idea either.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What the hell?' At the same moment two men in masks and blue hoodies cut them off in front. 'What're they doing?' Tommy asked, startled. Before either boy could react, the masked men shot the pair with tranquilizer darts. Tommy went down immediately, out cold. Oliver managed to pull the dart from his neck, but the tranquilizer was already working; he sagged against the rear of the car.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"How could you do that, Oliver?" Iris asked curiously.<p>

"I've had experience with tranquilizers, though obviously it didn't help this time," Oliver muttered, glowering at the screen.

\* \* \*

><p><em>He barely saw a cook appear at the top of a staircase on one side of the alley with a trash bag in his hands. 'Hey!' the man called. A third masked man with a submachine gun promptly shot him.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Thea gasped and turned away.<p>

Barry snarled, "I'd like to get my hands on that thug. He had no right to shoot an innocent man."

"This is the Glades, Mr. Allen," Malcolm retorted sharply. "Criminals there don't care about the lives of innocent people. The man who murdered my wife didn't."

"Nor did the man who murdered my wife," Henry said coolly, fixing Malcolm with a steely glare. "The circumstances were different, but do not think you are the only one who has suffered at the hands on a madman." Barry and Tommy both looked grim faced at the reminder that they had lost their mothers at an early age. Iris laid a hand on Barry's arm.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver slumped to the ground, reaching for Tommy. The last thing he saw before he passed out was one of the masked men leering down at him.<em>

\_\*\*Five Years Ago - 2007 - Queen's Gambit life raft, adrift in the North China Sea\*\*\_

\_The crewman finished setting up a fluorescent light above the raft. All four survivors were in life jackets. Oliver and Matthew huddled against the sides, Matthew nearly asleep. Robert gently roused the younger boy before handing his sons each a bottle of water. 'Here, drink.' Oliver unscrewed the cap on his bottle and drank. Matthew fumbled with his; Robert took it from him and removed the cap before helping the boy drink.\_

\_'What the hell are you doing?!' the crewman shouted, pointing at the bottles. 'That's all we've got!'\_

\_Robert glared at the man. 'If anybody's making it out of here, it's gonna be them!' He pulled both his sons close, shouting to be heard over the storm's fury. 'I'm so sorry. I thought I'd have more time. I'm not the man you think I am. I didn't build our city, I failed it. And I wasn't the only one.' They both stared at him in confusion.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What did Dad mean by that?" Thea asked, looking at her brothers

in confusion. "How did he fail Starling?"<p>

Matthew shook his head. "He never really told us why, Thea, only that we had to right his wrongs. I suspect there's more to it that will be revealed." Malcolm had to hide a smirk at that - if the boy only knew how true it was.

The Central City crowd were surprised and in some cases shocked by Robert's words. The older adults - Joe, Henry, and Stein - knew that Starling was a breeding ground for crime, though not nearly as bad as their sister city Gotham, but they had not expected to hear this.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_ 'Mr. Queen! Mr. Queen!' The bag was ripped off Oliver's head. One of the masked men stood in front of him. The thug had a Taser and hit the activation stud, sending a current of electricity between the two prongs at the end. 'Did your father survive that accident?' Oliver said nothing, instead taking stock of his situation. He was sitting on a chair in what seemed to be a deserted warehouse with his hands zip-tied behind his back. The other two thugs, both armed, were also present. One stood near Tommy, who lay unconscious on a wooden pallet with his hands tied.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm growled low in his throat on seeing his son tied up. Had he been there, the thugs would have regretted kidnapping Tommy. Henry, too, scowled at the screen, knowing he would have done the same thing for Barry, as would Joe.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver gritted his teeth and flexed his bound hands. 'I ask the questions,' the man said, interrupting Oliver's musings. 'You give me the answers.' When Oliver said nothing, the thug tasered him. Oliver screamed.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"That has to hurt," Ronnie muttered, wincing as he rubbed his chest.<p>

"It does," Joe, Quentin, and Eddie replied simultaneously. "For the criminals," Eddie added. "I'm surprised this scumbag had one, though." He glanced at Oliver. "Did it really hurt you, Mr. Queen, or were you just lulling them into a false sense of security?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, Detective Thawne," Oliver said evenly. Matthew barely managed to stifle a snort, for he knew full well a Taser wouldn't faze Oliver, or himself for that matter.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Did he make it to the island? Did he tell you anything?' the thug demanded, then shocked Oliver again. Oliver screamed once more, then lowered his head, breathing heavily. The thug loomed over him, waiting for an answer. <em>

\_Finally Oliver said, 'Yes, he did.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra stiffened, her reaction causing a few suspicious looks. Malcolm barely refrained from doing so himself. <em>What had Robert told Oliver?<em> he wondered.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The thug leaned close. 'What did he tell you, Mr. Queen?'<em>

\_Oliver looked the thug straight in the eyes. 'He told me I'm gonna kill you.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara laid a hand on Oliver's shoulder, surprising him with her support. Talia and Dusan were not in the least shocked by Oliver's statement; neither were Ra's and Nyssa. Malcolm looked back at the younger archer and gave him a slight nod of respect.<p>

Everyone else, on the other hand, was horrified by Oliver's threat. Oliver stared at the screen impassively, not meeting his mother's, sister's, or Tommy's gaze.

\* \* \*

><p><em> All three of them laughed. 'You're delusional,' Oliver's interrogator said. 'You're zip cuffed to that chair.'<em>

\_Oliver raised his freed hands. 'Not anymore.' Before they could react, he moved, ducking a punch from his interrogator. He flipped the chair up to block a second blow, then reversed the chair to send the hard edge of the seat into the chest of the second thug. Ripping out the back seat posts, Oliver spun around to stake his interrogator in the heart. For good measure, he thrust the Taser under the thug's jaw and shocked him, sending him to the floor. He grabbed the second thug and swung him around in front of him as a shield just as the third thug fired. The bullets struck the second thug in the chest, killing him instantly. On seeing that, the surviving thug bolted from the room. Oliver let the dead man drop and ran over to Tommy. He bent down to check his pulse, making sure his friend was alive. Satisfied that he would be all right, Oliver took off after the third man just as Tommy started to come around.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You probably suspect," Barry said to Tommy.<p>

The older man nodded. "Likely."

\* \* \*

><p><em>The thug fled outside, across the rooftops. Oliver followed close behind, not even deterred when the man fired wildly behind him. After a few minutes' pursuit, the thug raced down a set of stairs to ground level. Oliver leaped down behind him and continued the

pursuit. The thug ran into a warehouse, ripping off his mask as he did so. Oliver followed him inside, running across a catwalk as the man fired at him once again. When he tried to reload, Oliver took advantage, leaping off the catwalk and grabbing a set of chains. He crashed into the thug, sending the gun flying, and punched him in the face before spinning around to wrap his arms around the man's neck from behind in a reverse choke.<em>

\_ 'You killed that man,' Oliver said.\_

\_ 'You don't have to do this,' the thug gasped.\_

\_ 'Yes, I do,' Oliver replied. With a jerk, he broke the man's neck and let the limp body fall to the ground. 'Nobody can know my secret.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Barry gaped at the screen, unable to believe what he had seen. He had admired Oliver's skill up to this point, but this ... it made his blood run cold.<p>

Henry was mildly disturbed by Oliver's brutality, but had to admit that if he had gotten his hands on the man who murdered his wife, he would have done the same thing.

Quentin's anger surged back to the forefront again at seeing how casually Queen had killed a man; it confirmed his belief that a vigilante would have no place in Starling and he would do his damned best to keep Queen in a jail cell where he belonged if the man tried to clean up Starling City under the hood.

Joe and Eddie were none too pleased either, with the latter shooting Oliver a barbed glare and the former pursing his lips in disapproval.

Diggie, on the other hand, had to admit the thugs had gotten what was coming to them. He didn't approve of Oliver's methods, but the men had kidnapped him and Tommy.

Dr. Stein eyed the young man closely, wondering just what it was that had turned him into a stone cold killer.

Iris leaned against her father for comfort, closing her eyes as if to try to block out the sound of bone snapping.

Ronnie was shocked at Oliver's actions. Caitlin gripped his hand tightly, her fingers digging into his arm.

Cisco shuddered and looked away, unable to stand looking at the corpse. He felt nausea rising in his throat and hoped he wouldn't puke and embarrass himself.

Moirra was shocked at her older son's actions, but also thoughtful. Walter could not believe that the carefree young man he remembered would have ended someone's life in such a brutal manner. Thea was stunned as she stared at the screen.

Laurel clapped a hand over her mouth, trying to stifle a horrified gasp.

Felicity leaned over and put her head between her knees, trying to suppress the urge to throw up.

Roy was not too surprised at the violence of Oliver's actions; he had grown up in the Glades, after all, and had seen such brutality nearly every day from the scum who roamed freely in the area.

Tommy was the only one who gave voice to what he was feeling. "You killed those men in cold blood," he accused, whirling on Oliver with fire in his eyes. "You're a murderer!"

"Enough, Tommy!" Matthew roared. Tommy shrank back slightly from the fury in the teen's tone, but his harsh glare did not waver. "Oliver had no way of knowing what they were going to do to him or you. One thing that we learned at great cost on Lian Yu was to survive - by any means necessary. If that meant we had to kill, so be it."

Tommy slumped back in his seat, silent. The others looked at the brothers in shock, horror, or disgust, but no one dared say anything. After a few tense minutes had elapsed the recording resumed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>On their return to the mansion Oliver and Tommy were interviewed in the sitting room by Detectives Lance and Hilton. The two friends sat on one of the couches. Moira and Walter sat across from them, with Matthew perched on the sofa arm beside his mother. Lance sat beside the coffee table. In front of him was a sketch of Oliver and Tommy's 'saviors', two men in hoods.<em>

\_'So that's your story,' Lance said. 'Two men in hoods - one green, the other red - flew in and singlehandedly took out three armed kidnappers.' He shrugged. 'I mean, who are they? Why would they do that?'

\_Oliver shrugged in return. 'I don't know. Find them and you can ask.' Matthew shot his brother a subtle stare before leaning forward to examine the sketch.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Eddie snorted in disdain. "Oh, like that's going to happen." Oliver gave the cop a hard look.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Yeah,' Lance said doubtfully. He looked at Tommy. 'What about you? You see the hood guys?' He lifted the sketch.<em>

\_'I saw -' Tommy hesitated, his eyes flickering to Oliver, who looked back at him with an unreadable expression. 'Just movement,' he said finally. 'Everything blurry. I was kind of out of it.'

\_'Yeah,' Lance repeated in disbelief. He looked back at Oliver. 'It's funny, isn't it? One day back, and already somebody's gunning for you. Aren't you popular?'

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you talking about the thugs or yourself, Dad?" Sara said sharply. Quentin glared at his younger daughter - he didn't like it being implied that he was going after Queen because Sara had been on the yacht.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moirra's eyes narrowed. 'Were you able to identify the men?' she asked.<em>

\_ 'Scrubbed identities, untraceable weapons,' Hilton said from where he stood with Raisa. 'These were pros.'\_

\_ 'Yeah,' Lance added. 'Well, they probably figured you'd pay a king's ransom to get your boy back - or a Queen's ransom, as it were.' His gaze turned to Oliver. 'After all, a parent would do anything to keep their child safe.' He looked at Matthew. 'I would be careful, Matthew. After failing to hold Oliver, whoever ordered his kidnapping might come for you next.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Talia leaned forward. "Is that concern I hear for my beloved, Detective?"<p>

"No," the cop shot back with a scowl. "Just doing my duty." Faint scoffs of disbelief came from Oliver and Dusan, but Lance did not bother to look at the two men. Thea tried to suppress a smile - it seemed the Detective did have a soft spot for her twin, despite his denial.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I don't find your tone appropriate, Detective,' Moira said sharply. Walter stood and smoothed his jacket.<em>

\_ 'If Oliver can think of anything else, he'll be in touch,' he said with finality. 'Thank you, gentlemen, for coming.'\_

\_Lance smiled coldly and stood as Oliver did, returning the drawing to his briefcase. He stared at Oliver. 'Your luck never seems to run out, does it?' he said quietly. Oliver stared at him; after a moment the two cops left the room with Raisa. Oliver walked to the window and took a deep breath before turning to look at Tommy, who stared back with an unreadable expression of his own. Oliver's eyes flickered to his brother; the teenager tilted his head.\_

\* \* \*

><p>'What was that about?" Ronnie asked. Matthew only shrugged.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>After a moment Tommy cleared his throat and said, 'There's something I've been meaning to talk to you both about.' The brothers turned to regard him. Tommy continued, 'I saw the way you both reacted last night when Robbie hugged me.' Matthew's jaw tightened and Oliver was about to speak, but Tommy held up a hand. 'Let me finish.' Matthew gave him a reluctant nod. 'You have to understand, Ollie. Robbie only knows of you and Matt through the childhood



stories your mother and Thea have told him. Until yesterday, Thea was the only living sibling he knew he had. I've spent a lot of time with him, teaching him to ride a bike, to play ball, all the things your father taught us.' A flicker of pain crossed Oliver's face at the reminder of Robert Queen. Matthew turned away and looked out the window, but Tommy knew he was still listening. 'He's like a kid brother to me. That will never change. And he looks to me as an older brother. But, Ollie, that doesn't change the fact that you and Matt are still his brothers, more than I am. Spend time with him, get to know him and teach him. All I ask is, don't be jealous if he wants to spend time with me rather than with you.'

Oliver was silent for so long that Tommy wondered what was going through his head, but he finally said, 'Thank you, Tommy. I appreciate that.' Matthew turned from his contemplation of the grounds and gave Tommy a small smile.

\* \* \*

"Thank you, Tommy," Matthew said, leaning forward to meet his friend's eyes as the older man turned around.

Tommy nodded seriously. "It's the truth. Robbie needs you more than he needs me."

\* \* \*

Later, in Oliver's room, he studied news articles on his computer about Adam Hunt. He opened his father's notebook, and sure enough Adam Hunt's name was on the List.

'You are different.' Oliver looked up and smiled at Raisa as she entered his room with a tray of food. He turned the notebook over and cleared his monitor. 'Not like you to read a book.'

'I missed you, Raisa,' he said warmly.

'No kitchen on the island?' she said knowingly.

'No. No friends either.' He stood and went to her, taking the tray. 'Hey. Thank you.' He set the tray down on the table beside his bed, then looked back at Raisa. 'Do I really seem different?'

'No,' she said. 'You're still a good boy.'

'Oh, I think we both know I wasn't,' Oliver denied.

\* \* \*

Quentin snorted. "Neither you or Merlyn Jr. were," he said bluntly. Both young men flinched at the reminder of their escapades, and the cop received harsh glares from Moira and Malcolm.

\* \* \*

'But a good heart,' she added warmly. Oliver smiled.

'I hope so,' he said. 'I want to be the person you always told me I could be.'

\_The following morning Oliver was about to leave the mansion when his mother's voice stopped him short. 'Oliver.' He turned as she and Walter came up. Behind them a tall, well built black man stood with folded hands next to the Bentley. 'I want to introduce you to someone. John Diggle. He'll be accompanying you from now on.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Interesting," Diggle muttered - he had been mostly silent so far. "So it looks like I'm going to be babysitting them."<p>

Matthew scoffed. "As if we need it," he deadpanned.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver smiled incredulously as he glanced at the stranger. 'I don't need a babysitter.'<em>

\_ 'Darling, Oliver's a grown man,' Walter added. 'And if he doesn't feel he needs armed protection -'\_

\_ 'Yes, I understand,' Moira interjected, 'but this is something I need. And I would feel better about Matthew being out in the city as well.' Oliver sighed in resignation and looked once more at the bodyguard.\_

\_Matthew came outside then, pausing on the steps as he saw John Diggle. He raised an eyebrow at Oliver, who responded with a shrug. Matthew rolled his eyes in exasperation.\_

\_A short time later Diggle drove the Bentley downtown with the brothers in the back seat.\_

\_ 'So - what do we call you?' Oliver asked. Diggle glanced at them in the rearview mirror.\_

\_ 'Diggle's good,' he said. 'Dig if you want.'\_

\_ 'You're ex military?' Matthew continued.\_

\_ 'Yes, sir,' he replied. '105th Airborne out of Khandahar, retired. Been in the private sector a little more than four years now.' He glanced in the mirror again. 'I don't want there to be any confusion, Mr. Queen. My ability to keep you from harm will outweigh your comfort. Do we have an agreement? Sir?' A car door slammed shut, followed by the sound of horns honking. He glanced over his shoulder to see that both men were gone. 'Sir!' He slammed on the brakes, jumped out of the car, and threw the back door open - but there was no sign of them. He glanced around in frustration.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tommy, Thea, Barry, Cisco, and Roy burst into laughter. Felicity grinned at Diggle as the bodyguard rolled his eyes in exasperation.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Meanwhile the brothers calmly made their way through the Glades with duffel bags over their shoulders. On reaching the

abandoned steel mill, Matthew tossed his bags over the fence, ignoring the warning signs posted everywhere, and vaulted it with ease. Oliver followed suit. Together they entered the mill, which was littered with trash and smelled dank from years of disuse. Oliver paused when something on the floor caught his eye. He picked up the old Queen Consolidated annual report with Robert Queen's face on the cover and handed it to Matthew.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>The brothers did not meet anyone's eyes, not wanting to see the looks of sympathy they knew the Central City viewers were giving them.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The abduction was unexpected. It forced us to move up our plans, but what I told the police was true. The men in the hoods were there in that warehouse, and they're just beginning.'<em>

\_The brothers began to set up their lair - knocking down walls, breaking through the floor to the basement below, maneuvering a generator and other equipment delivered via unconventional sources into the space. Soon several tables had been set up. Lights over each of the tables flickered on when Matthew powered up the generator. Oliver set up the computers at the front and started uploading and sorting files. \_

\_While the computers worked, Matthew forged arrows and Oliver worked out on the salmon ladder. Once Matthew was done with the arrows, he stripped off his shirt and took his turn on the ladder while Oliver continued his workout on the floor.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Wow," Felicity murmured in admiration.<p>

Thea eyed her askance. "That's my brothers you're admiring, Miss Smoak, and one is entirely too young for you." Uncomfortable laughter rippled through the room; Iris and even Laurel glanced nervously at Talia, worried how she would react to the fact that they had secretly been admiring Matthew as well, but the younger Daughter of the Demon did not seem to be too concerned.

Inwardly, Talia was debating whether or not to cut them to pieces for looking at her beloved that way ... though if she did, there wouldn't be anything left afterward.

Barry, Tommy, and to a lesser extent Cisco were struggling with feelings of jealousy as they watched the brothers work out. Oh, they had exercised in their spare time, of course, but it was nothing compared to the routine Oliver and Matthew had obviously worked out.

\* \* \*

><p><em>After the workout was finished, they pulled their shirts back on before opening their island crates and retrieving their bows. The quivers were slung on their backs, then Matthew kicked over a bucket of tennis balls. As the balls bounced out onto the floor, both

archers drew, nocked, aimed, and fired with blinding speed. In a matter of minutes all the balls were pinned to the back wall, each with an arrow dead center.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco, Barry, and Ronnie all whistled in amazement. Malcolm watched the screen closely, noting how the brothers handled their bows. His own compound bow was easy for him to handle, but would be difficult for Matthew and possibly Oliver. They were using custom recurve bows instead. He saw that Matthew handled his bow with ease despite his youth. How long had it taken him to become accustomed to using it?<p>

Nyssa eyed her sister's lover with keen interest. The boy had surprised her in many ways, both on screen and in the room. She was beginning to see what had drawn Talia to him; he was handsome, athletic, fiercely devoted to his family and willing to do whatever necessary to right the wrongs his father had done. \_His stepfather, rather.\_ She glanced subtly at Al-Sa-Her; the physical resemblance between the two was strong, but the boy clearly took after Moira Queen in spirit.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later still they sat before the computer watching a news broadcast about Adam Hunt. Matthew glanced at Oliver as the photos of Hunt and Laurel flashed on the screen. Oliver hadn't said much about what occurred the previous day, but Matthew knew he had gone to see Laurel and it hadn't ended well. At the time of the <strong>Gambit's</strong> sinking he had not understood why Sara had been aboard, or what had happened between Oliver and Laurel, but as he grew older during their exile many of the conversations he had overheard between his parents and all the times Oliver had gotten in trouble began to make sense. He knew now that his brother had been an irresponsible playboy before the sinking, and by bringing Sara on the \*\*Gambit\*\* Oliver had hurt both Laurel and her father. Seeing Detective Lance's interaction with Oliver the previous day had driven the point home; Lance despised Oliver for Sara's death and would never forgive him. Matthew contemplated going to the Lances and telling them the truth about Lian Yu, but was there really any point to it? Sara was still dead, even if it was not how Quentin and Laurel thought, and they would not believe him if he said that Oliver was a changed man. But then again, Oliver had decided to adopt his old playboy façade to hide the real Oliver Queen underneath.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew glanced sidelong at Oliver. "You know, Ollie, I haven't forgotten all that time you spent staring at Laurel's picture on Lian Yu."<p>

"Oh, shut up," Oliver snapped. Laurel looked at him in surprise, but chose to say nothing. Quentin was likewise shocked, but had a feeling that if he tried to prod Oliver for answers he would get none.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The suit alleges that Hunt committed multiple acts of fraud and theft against the city's underprivileged. Laurel Lance, an

attorney for the City Necessary -'<em>

\_'Adam Hunt,' Oliver said, glancing at Matthew. 'His crimes go deeper than fraud and theft, but he's been able to bully, bribe, or kill anyone who's gotten into his way.' Oliver stood and went to his weapons table. He picked up a knife and studied it briefly before setting it back down. Going to his crate, he pulled out a familiar green hood. 'He hasn't met us yet.'\_

\_Matthew gave Oliver a vicious grin as he went to his own crate and pulled out a red hood. 'Time for Mr. Hunt to face the protectors of Starling City.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Everyone straightened, realizing they were about to see the brothers in action for the first time and curious - or apprehensive - as to how the confrontation would play out.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>That night Hunt, his bodyguards, and Laurel's boss Eric Gitter strode through a dark parking garage to Hunt's limo. 'You remind Grell I put him on the bench, I can take him off,' Hunt said viciously. 'I will turn him into a cautionary tale.'<em>

\_'Yes, Mr. Hunt,' Gitter replied.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I should have known," Laurel snarled. "Hunt probably convinced him to agree to the venue change!" Her father glowered at the screen in disgust - he had thought Gitter a decent man, but now, with this revelation, he loathed him.<p>

Malcolm stared at Gitter through slitted eyes. He might have to pay the man a visit under his Dark Archer alter ego when they returned.

"This man," Ra's said softly, startling everyone, "is spineless and weak. He claims to care about the less fortunate, but we see now where his loyalties truly lie. Those like him, who sell their souls to the more powerful, make a mockery of justice. Sometimes, Detective Lance, true justice cannot be accomplished within the bounds of the law. In those times, the work that Oliver Queen and young Matthew are doing is necessary."

"That is the reason the Justice League was founded," Hal Jordan said from the top row. "All of us have dedicated our lives to fighting injustice, no matter what form it takes."

Laurel and her father both looked thoughtful as the recording resumed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'And this attorney, Laurel Lance?' Hunt sneered. 'You said she wasn't gonna be a problem anymore. I told you to fix that situation.' He stopped and turned on Gitter. 'Why are you still here?' Gitter nodded subserviently and left.<em>

\_The other three continued to the limo. Abruptly a light exploded behind them, plunging the garage into darkness. The first guard turned to look, reaching for his gun - but was felled by an arrow. He fell with a cry as the second guard shoved Hunt into the back of the limo. 'Get in the car!' he commanded, then turned around, drawing his weapon and firing several times into the darkness. He paused, searching for a target.\_

\_'Hey,' a mocking voice called out. Inside the limo Hunt's eyes widened. 'You missed.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea turned and smirked at her twin. "Nice to see you could find some humor in the situation, Matthew." Her brother snickered.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The second bodyguard fell, then the glass in the limo's passenger side window shattered. Hunt ducked and covered his head as the glass flew everywhere. Once it had settled, he looked up to see an arrow lodged in the back of the passenger seat. He reached for it in puzzlement -<em>

\_And was yanked through the shattered window and tossed to the ground. He rolled onto his back to see the brothers, in their hoods and jackets, with grease paint around their eyes, standing on the roof of the car. The brims of the hoods were pulled low to shield their faces.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Roy sniggered. "Grease paint? Really?"<p>

Matthew and Oliver both scowled at him. "If you have a better suggestion, please share it," Matthew snapped irritably.

Cisco gave them a grin. "Actually, I do." Their stares turned on him, and he added, "I'll tell you later."

Ronnie laughed and remarked, "Trust Cisco to come up with a solution." The younger man went red at Ronnie's praise. Caitlin lightly slapped her fiancÃ© on the arm.

"Don't embarrass him, Ronnie." The others smiled in amusement, several of the older adults shaking their heads.

\* \* \*

><p><em>And <em>\_they both had arrows nocked and aimed right at Hunt's chest. 'Aah!' the man screamed, raising his hands. 'What? What? Just - just tell me what you want!'\_

\_The vigilantes jumped off the roof of the car, the Scarlet Archer hauling Hunt to his feet and slamming him up against the garage wall. 'You're gonna transfer forty million dollars into Starling City Bank account 1141 by 10 pm tomorrow night,' he snarled.\_

\_'Or what?' Hunt shot back with a scowl.\_

\_ 'Or we're gonna take it, and you won't like how,' the Emerald Archer snapped. His companion released Hunt and they turned to leave.\_

\_ 'If I see either of you again, you're dead!' Hunt shouted boldly. The Emerald Archer whirled and loosed an arrow into the limo's back windshield. Hunt looked at the hole in shock, then turned back to the Hoods -\_

\_but they were already gone.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Theatricality and deception," Ra's said calmly. "Very effective tools in the pursuit of justice." He looked at his son. "Am I correct that you and Talia have been training them?"<p>

Dusan only nodded, but Talia leaned forward and stared at her father. "You're considering how to recruit them for the League, aren't you?"

Ra's looked at his daughter evenly, but Oliver growled, "Not happening, Ra's." He glared at the Demon's Head. "I won't join your League."

"Nor I," Matthew added tightly.

"Just because we've been training them doesn't mean they will swear allegiance to you," Dusan said icily. "You know Mrs. Queen and Thea will not want that. Keep them out of your games."

"With a little persuasion, they would," Ra's replied calmly, his eyes deliberately flicking from Matthew to Talia.

Dusan stiffened and bit out, "Don't even think about it, Father. Or have you so willingly forgotten why we fled Nanda Parbat in the first place?"

"I have not forgotten," Ra's returned, his tone hardening. "And think before you speak, Dusan. I am still your father, and you will obey." The young man's glare hardened and Nyssa leaned over to touch his arm.

"Don't antagonize him, Dusan."

Quentin abruptly changed the subject. "You left Hunt alive?" he said, giving Oliver an incredulous look. "I honestly expected you to be dropping another body."

"I don't always kill my opponents," Oliver replied sharply. "Hunt was not a clear danger to either of us."

"Stripping him of his wealth and power works just as well," Nyssa added, leaning forward to look at Lance. "Mr. Hunt is not a man capable of defending himself, so there was no need for Mr. Queen to kill him. A better point has been made by leaving Hunt alive - if he and Matthew killed everyone they went after, the lesson they are determined to teach Starling City's criminals would be lost because the criminals would want vengeance for their dead."

The Detective's expression turned thoughtful as he looked back at the screen.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning Hunt gave his statement to Lance and Hilton at his penthouse office. 'They were both wearing hoods - one green, the other red - and they had bows and arrows.' The cops exchanged glances; Hunt noticed it and scowled. 'What, you don't believe me?' He turned to pick up two arrows that were lying on his desk, one with a red tip and the other green, and handed them to Hilton. 'Those maniacs put two of my men in the hospital.'<em>

\_Hilton handed the arrows to Lance, who studied them briefly before looking at Hunt. 'Well, thanks for your statement. We'll put out an APB on ..' he paused, then said mockingly, 'Robin Hood and Will Scarlett.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>The brothers both growled in disgust. "That's the best you could come up with?" Matthew snapped sourly.<p>

The cop raised his hands defensively. "I have to call your alter egos something."

"Yeah, well, you could have picked a better name," Oliver grouched. By this time Thea, Iris, and Felicity were all laughing, Roy was smirking at their discomfort, and Tommy was shaking in his seat as he tried to contain his own mirth.

"Oh, come on, Matt," Thea teased her twin. "You actually look handsome in your leathers." Matthew glared at her as their mother's lips twitched in amusement.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Hunt scowled at the detectives. 'Hey, pal. I'm not some grocer who got taken for his register. I go to the front of the line.' He stepped back and looked at both cops. 'Now, they said they would be back here by 10 PM. Make sure you're here first. You can coordinate with Mr. Drakon, my new head of security.' He gestured to a tall, thin man in black, who stepped out of the shadows with hands on his hips.<em>

\_Lance and Hilton eyed him uncertainly. 'All right,' Lance said finally. 'Well, uh, thanks for your time.' The partners strode past Drakon out of the office, with Hilton holding the arrows.\_

\_As they headed for the elevator Hilton said, 'It looks like Queen was telling the truth.'\_

\_ 'Yeah,' Lance grunted. 'Well, there's a first time for everything.' The elevator arrived and the two stepped in as the doors opened. 'These hood guys come looking for trouble,' he finished as the doors began to close, 'they'll find it.'\_

\* \* \*



><p>"Oh, really?" Matthew sniped, glaring at the Detective. "Good luck trying to catch us."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>That evening Oliver left the mansion to go to his welcome home party. When he opened the back door of the Bentley, he saw John Diggle already sitting in the back seat.<em>

\_ 'Put on your seatbelt, sir,' Diggle said with a smile. 'Wouldn't want you to miss your party.' Oliver smiled in amusement as he climbed in.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Diggle shot Oliver a self satisfied smirk. "You won't slip the leash so easily this time, Queen."<p>

"Not for the time being, no," Oliver allowed. "In the future?" He gave Diggle a sly smile. "Who knows?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>The party was already in full swing when Oliver arrived at the Iron Works Building. As he walked down the main staircase, he retrieved his phone from his jacket to see if Hunt had deposited the money yet. He hadn't, and it was only fifty-three minutes until the 10 PM deadline. <em>

\_ Oliver frowned briefly as he returned the phone to his jacket, but slipped on his 'Oliver Queen - party boy' face just as Tommy spotted him. His friend signaled for the DJ to cut the music. \_

\_ 'Everybody, hey!' he called out as he bounded up the stairs to Oliver and clapped him on the shoulder. 'Man of the hour! Whoo!' The crowd roared. 'And, ladies, please give this man a proper homecoming!'\_

\_ 'We Are the Champions' began to play as Oliver made his way to the main stage in the middle of the floor. 'Thank you very much, everybody!' he called.\_

\_ 'Ollie, Ollie, Ollie.' Tommy handed him a glass.\_

\_ Oliver downed it quickly and shouted, 'I missed tequila!' The crowd cheered as the music resumed.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra. shook her head at Oliver's antics, though she wasn't too upset, knowing it was only a cover. Caitlin was mildly impressed that Oliver was so adept at masking his true self and feelings, though it was also a worrying prospect considering how many walls he had erected around himself. Where was the real Oliver Queen?<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>9:25 PM. Across the street in Adam Hunt's penthouse, his security guards checked and loaded their weapons, preparing for a visit by the Hoods. With drink in hand, Hunt frowned as he looked out

the window.<em>

\_ 'What the hell's going on out there?' he demanded.\_

\_'It's across the street,' Constantine Drakon replied. 'Party for the guy that got rescued off that island - Oliver Queen.' Hunt nodded sourly as he took a sip of the drink before returning to his desk.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea and Tommy laughed at the look on Hunt's face.<p>

Roy rolled his eyes. "What an idiot," he sneered. "He's making it all too easy for Oliver and Matthew to get to him."

Matthew smirked. "Of course. Why do you think Oliver picked the Iron Works Building?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the party, Oliver smiled at Diggle. The bodyguard stood across the room in a corner, though his eyes never left Oliver.<em>

\_'Hey,' Tommy said, coming up next to his friend. 'Does he wipe for you, too?' Oliver chuckled as Tommy threw an arm around his shoulders. 'Now by my rough estimate, you have not had sex in 1,839 days. As your wingman, I highly recommend Carmen Golden.' He turned Oliver to face the three girls dancing on the stage.\_

\_'Which one is she?' Oliver asked.\_

\_'The one who looks like the chick from \*\*'Twilight'\*\*.\_

\_'What's \*\*'Twilight'\*\*?'\_

\_'You're so better off not knowing,' Tommy deadpanned as he took a sip of his drink.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>'Twilight'<strong> is terrible,' Thea muttered.

Iris shook her head. "Actually, Thea, I enjoy those movies."

"Are you serious?" Thea said incredulously. "A sappy love story between a human and a vampire? Give me a break."

"A genuine love story," Iris countered. "Edward respects Bella and would never do anything to hurt her."

"I never liked the movies because I thought Bella was better suited to Jacob," Laurel interjected. "Edward's too stiff."

Felicity jumped in then. "I agree with Iris. Edward and Bella are perfect together." By this point Tommy, Barry, Ronnie, Roy, and Cisco were all rolling their eyes. Caitlin didn't care much for \*\*Twilight\*\*, but she had to admit to herself that the thought of Ronnie sparkling in the sunlight sent a thrill through her. The older

adults listened to the debate with amusement.

Thea appealed to her brothers. "What do you think about \*\*Twilight\*\*, Ollie? Matt?"

Matthew shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Actually, Oliver and I have never seen any of the movies." He gave her a sly smile. "But maybe you can help remedy that while we're here." Thea groaned loudly as Malcolm snorted in amusement; the boy had turned the tables quite deftly on his sister.

"Excuse me for asking this, but what exactly is \*\*Twilight\*\*?" Nyssa queried.

"It's a book series about a human girl who falls in love with an immortal vampire," Iris explained. "Their romance has its ups and downs, but they eventually marry and he changes her into a vampire. The books were turned into movies a few years ago. In fact," she added, "the final movie is supposed to be released this fall."

Nyssa nodded in understanding. "Thank you for clearing it up, Miss West."

Malcolm smirked. It was always interesting to see how many authors and filmmakers tackled the issue of immortality; their approaches had been many and varied. He himself was familiar with the concept, for Ra's had showed him the Lazarus Pit during his days in Nanda Parbat.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver scanned the crowd and spotted something he didn't like - Thea, with some of her friends, talking with a guy on the floor. He saw her pass him some cash and palm a packet of pills in return. Oliver frowned. 'Back in a minute,' he told Tommy and headed for his sister. Diggle noticed and followed him.<em>

\_Thea smiled when she saw him. 'Ollie, hey!' she said as he grasped her arm, lightly pulling her away from her friends. 'This party is sick!'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea groaned and Tommy caught her attention, frowning in disapproval. Walter shook his head and Moira pursed her lips.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Who let you in here?' Oliver demanded quietly.<em>

\_ 'I believe it was somebody who said, 'Right this way, Miss Queen', ' she replied sarcastically.\_

\_ 'Well, you shouldn't be here.'\_

\_Thea narrowed her eyes as she pulled her arm free. 'I'm not twelve anymore.'\_

\_ 'No. You're seventeen.'\_

\_Thea scoffed. 'Ollie, I love you, but you can't come back her and judge me, especially for being just like you.'\_

\_Oliver sighed wearily. 'I know that it couldn't have been easy for you when Matt and I were away.'\_

\_Thea interrupted him. 'Away?' she repeated. 'No. You died. My brothers and my father died. I went to your funerals.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>A faint creak came from the fourth row as Matthew shifted uncomfortably in his seat.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I know,' Oliver said, but Thea cut him off.<em>

\_ 'No, you don't.' For the first time Oliver caught a glimpse of the pain Thea had been hiding ever since his return. 'Mom had Walter, and I had no one.' She was fighting back tears now. 'Do you have any idea how lost I was when Mom told me Matthew died on the **\*\*Gambit\*\***? It felt like my heart had been ripped in two.' Oliver closed his eyes, knowing that what Thea said was true; the twins had always been close.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I really missed you, Matt," Thea said, turning to look at her twin with tears in her eyes.<p>

Matthew swallowed hard, trying to keep his composure from crumbling, and finally whispered, "So did I."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You guys all act like its cool; lets forget about the last five years. Well, I can't. For me, it's kind of permanently in there. So I'm sorry if I turned out to be some major disappointment, but this - me, this is the best I could do with what I had to work with.' Oliver didn't open his eyes, unable to meet her gaze. Thea turned to her friends. 'Let's bounce.' The four girls walked away.<em>

\_ 'You have the fun dip?' Margo asked. Thea, still a little shaken, fumbled for her purse.\_

\_ 'Yeah. It's right -' she felt inside her purse but couldn't find the packet of pills. 'No,' she said in confusion. 'I - I must have dropped it.'\_

\_ Oliver strode away, pausing at a trash can to throw away the packet he had palmed from Thea's purse. He looked up and caught Diggle's satisfied expression.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Good job, Ollie," Tommy said roughly. Thea gave him a disbelieving stare, but he shook his head. "That stuff can seriously mess you up, Thea. As wild as Oliver and I got sometimes, we still knew better than to touch the hard stuff." Oliver nodded in

confirmation of his friend's words. "Trust me, Thea. Keep using those drugs and you'll wind up in an early grave." Tommy deliberately chose his words to rattle Thea and get her to think; judging from the way she paled, it seemed he had hit his mark.<p>

Moirra was torn between chastising her daughter and apologizing for not being there for her. She reached over and took Thea's hand; the girl laced her fingers through her mother's.

Laurel felt a little guilty, knowing that she could have been there for Thea, but had not.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver turned to leave -<em>

\_only to run into Laurel.\_

\_ 'Oh!' he exclaimed. 'Oh. You're here.' \_

\_ 'Tommy,' Laurel said. 'He made the point that we have too many years between us to leave things the way we left them.' She glanced around. 'Is there someplace quieter that we could go?' \_

\_ 'Yeah.' Neither of them realized Tommy was watching their departure. They left the main room and went upstairs to the balcony overlooking the entrance hall.\_

\_ They walked quietly for a few minutes before Laurel spoke. 'I'm sorry about saying that you should have been the one who died. That was wrong.' \_

\_ 'If I could trade places with her, I would,' Oliver replied sincerely.\_

\_ 'About Sara,' Laurel said, stopping and turning to face Oliver. 'There's something that I've been afraid to ask, but I need to know.' \_

\_ 'OK,' Oliver said warily.\_

\_ 'When she died - did she suffer?' \_

\_ Oliver recalled the moment on the **Gambit** when Sara was swept from the cabin into the dark ocean beyond. 'No,' he lied.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel turned to look at Oliver. "I know you were trying to spare my feelings by lying, Ollie, and I'm actually glad of it." Oliver nodded shortly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I think about her every day.' Laurel said after a moment.<em>

\_ 'Me, too,' Oliver replied.\_

\_ 'I guess we still have one thing in common then. I can't believe I'm

gonna say this, but if you need someone to talk to about what happened to you, I'm here.'\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin eyed his daughter in surprise. Laurel looked just as shocked to hear the words coming out of her mouth.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>For a moment, his mask slipped, and the real Oliver Queen gazed at Laurel, wanting to take her up on that offer, but knowing he couldn't.<em>

\_ A buzz from Oliver's pocket interrupted them. He pulled out his phone and glanced at the face - 10 PM. The account app still showed zero. A text from Matthew flashed across the screen. \*\*Suiting up. On my way.\*\*\_\_

\_At the Foundry Matthew lowered his hood to hide his face and grabbed his bow.\_\_

\_Oliver shook his head. 'Something wrong?' Laurel asked. Oliver looked up at his former lover.\_\_

\_'I asked somebody to do something. They didn't do it.' The mask slid back into place. 'Laurel, you always saw the best in me. Right now, that's what you're doing, looking at me, and you're wondering if that island changed me somehow, if it made me a better person. It didn't.' Laurel stared at him. Oliver smiled slightly. 'Stay away from me. Otherwise I'm just gonna hurt you again, but this time it will be worse.' He stepped back, spreading his hands. 'Got to roll,' he said loudly. 'I've got five years of debauchery to catch up on! '\_\_

\_Stunned and angered by his declaration, Laurel closed the distance between them. 'You know what, Oliver? You're wrong. That island did change you. At least now you're honest.' With that parting shot, Laurel walked away.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't tell me I'm seriously buying his act?" Laurel said in disgust.<p>

"One thing we've gotten very good at, Laurel - we only show people what we want them to see," Matthew replied. "In this case, Oliver wants you to see him as the party boy still, and he's quite adept at masking who he really is."

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few minutes later Oliver strode purposefully through the service corridor, but was stopped short by a now familiar voice. 'Something I can help you with, sir?' John Diggle called out. Oliver sighed as he turned to face the bodyguard.<em>

\_'I just wanted a second to myself.' Diggle smiled lightly.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"That's a load of crap," Felicity and Cisco said simultaneously. The others nodded in agreement.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I would believe you, Mr. Queen, if you weren't so full of crap.' He gestured to the doors. 'Party's this way.'<em>

\_Oliver sighed in annoyance, then went to the door and tried the handle. 'It's locked,' he lied. Diggle looked at him for a moment, then went to try the door himself. As he reached for the handle, Oliver lashed out and caught Diggle in a chokehold, rendering him unconscious in seconds.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Diggle huffed and glared at Oliver. "Be glad I only knocked you out," Oliver said calmly.<p>

"I could have done without you doing it to ditch me again," the bodyguard grumbled.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Hunt International Drakon issued final orders to half a dozen guards. 'You two cover the elevator. Hang back and be ready. Stay in the corners and stay alert.' He entered the office and locked the doors. 'It's past 10:00,' he told Hunt. 'They're never getting in here.' Hunt nodded and went to the window where Drakon joined him.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Roy sniggered rudely. "In your dreams, Mr. Hunt." Barry grinned mockingly at the screen.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>In the street below, Lance and Hilton supervised the police and SWAT barricading the building.<em>

\_ 'All's clear,' Hilton told Lance.\_

\_ 'Yeah.' \_

\_A minute later, an arrow with a cable attached embedded itself in the outer wall of the building, just outside Hunt and Drakon's line of sight from the window.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Good riddance, slimeball," Tommy crowed. "You're going down, Hunt." Cisco and Ronnie both chortled in glee and everyone leaned forward to see what would happen.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>In Hunt's office the lights abruptly went out. The guards cocked their weapons as Hunt turned from the window. Then the hallway

elevator dinged.<em>

\_No sooner did the elevator doors open than an arrow flew out, killing one guard. His finger tightened on his gun's trigger as he fell, sending a spray of bullets into the ceiling. The archers emerged from the elevator and waded into Hunt's men. The scene quickly degenerated into chaos, shouts and gunfire echoing through the building.\_

\_The guards waiting in the office tensed as Hunt paced nervously. A moment later a figure was hurled clear through the office doors. One guard opened fire, riddling the intruder's body with bullets before realizing too late that he had killed one of his compatriots. The archers stormed into the office, the red hooded one swiftly dispatching the remaining bodyguards as his companion sent an arrow into the wall behind Hunt's desk before drawing another arrow on the man. The Scarlet Archer joined him and together they menaced Hunt.\_

\_'You missed,' Hunt sneered.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew scoffed. "Wrong, Mr. Hunt."<p>

"How so, Matthew?" Walter asked.

"We don't miss our targets unless they're moving too fast," Oliver replied.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Really?' the Emerald Archer replied. Suddenly Drakon flew out of the darkness to attack. Taking advantage of the opening, Hunt scurried from the room, shouting into his phone, 'They're here!'  
<em>

\_On the ground, Lance ordered, 'All units, converge! All units, converge!' The police stormed into the building.\_

\_As they rushed up the stairs, in the office the Hoods and Drakon continued to brawl. Both brothers were more than a match for the senior guard, but Drakon was crafty. He pulled out a knife and lunged; Matthew brought his hand down hard on the man's wrist, sending the knife skittering across the floor. However, Drakon caught him with a blow to the side of the head that sent Matthew to his knees, his ears ringing. Oliver and Drakon traded blows for several seconds before Oliver flipped Drakon to the floor - right beside a discarded Uzi. Drakon grabbed the gun, stood, turned, and fired as the Emerald Archer ran for Hunt's desk. Oliver twisted around as he leaped over the desk, flinging a fletcherette back at Drakon and killing him instantly. A moment later, however, Oliver landed hard on the floor on the other side of the desk, dazed, with his hood down to expose his face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Everyone winced, knowing Oliver's fall had been a hard one and hoping he was all right. Even Quentin hoped so.<p>



\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew rushed to his brother's side and tried to rouse him. He knew they could not risk being discovered. The police were coming closer; he heard Detective Lance's voice. 'Go right, go right. On me.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver, Matthew and Sara shot the cop identical harsh looks; he glowered at them and snapped, "Don't look at me like that."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver opened his eyes and sat up with a gasp. He reached under his jacket and pulled out the spent bullet that had lodged in his bulletproof vest. <em>

\_ 'Lay down your weapons, or we will open fire!' a cop shouted just outside the door. 'I repeat, lay down your weapons -'\_

\_ With the hood now back over his face, Oliver leaped to his feet as Matthew loosed an arrow that simultaneously disarmed both cops standing in the doorway. But Lance was right behind them and opened fire. The vigilantes turned -\_

\_ and leaped through a window into the night.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The younger adults burst into laughter. "Wasn't expecting that, eh, Lance?" Ronnie chortled. The Detective grimaced, his expression sour as if he'd bitten into a lemon. Iris leaned against Barry as she tried to stifle her laughter. Tommy slapped the arm of his chair. Roy gave Lance an insolent grin.<p>

Joe shook his head, feeling sorry for his fellow cop, though he could see the amusement in the situation. Eddie had similar thoughts.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Lance and Hilton ran to the window to see the hooded men crossing a zip-line back to the Iron Works. They exchanged disbelieving glances. 'Tell me you saw that,' Hilton said.<em>

\_ Lance took a deep breath. 'OK.' To the rest of the cops he said, 'Let's go. Move.'\_

\_ Minutes later the cops stormed the party. A man in SWAT gear rushed up to the DJ booth and shut it down as Lance entered, issuing orders to his men.\_

\_ 'Search the building roof to basement. Find them!' He raised his voice to the crowd. 'Starling City Police! The party's over, kids.' Boos greeted his words. He looked around and saw a familiar face. 'Oh, Mr. Merlyn.' Tommy grinned at the cop in amusement. 'Imagine my shock at finding you here. Did you roofie anyone special tonight, huh?' Lance asked snidely.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tommy glared at Lance in disgust. "I would never stoop that low," he said heatedly.<p>

"My son is not a rapist, Detective," Malcolm said coldly. "Insinuate anything of the kind again and you'll find yourself in over your head."

Lance was not cowed by Malcolm's threat. "Forgive me, Merlyn," he sneered, "but your son, while a prize stallion, is still no gentleman." By this time Laurel was glaring at her father. She turned her glare on Tommy, who shifted uncomfortably, knowing that her father's words were partly true.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Detective!' Oliver interrupted as he joined them. 'It's a private party.'<em>

\_'Yeah?' Lance retorted. 'Well, there was an incident at Adam Hunt's building tonight. You know anything about that?'

\_'Who's Adam Hunt?' Oliver asked with a bored expression.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Sociopathic vigilante," Quentin grumbled. Sara grimaced; if her father was reacting like this to Oliver's line of work, how would he react to her's and Nyssa's?<p>

"Careful, Detective," Talia advised, her voice ice cold. "Oliver may be cold hearted at times, but he is not a sociopath."

"Of course you'd know, wouldn't you?" Lance sneered.

Talia's demeanor hardened, but her voice remained calm as she said, "Dusan and I have been with them for the last five months, Detective. I can assure you that Oliver has not lost his humanity completely, nor has Matthew. Make of that what you will."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'He's a millionaire bottom feeder, and I'm kind of surprised you aren't friends.'<em>

\_'I've been out of town for ... a while,' Oliver replied mildly. Tommy didn't even try to hide his smile.\_

\_'Yeah. Well, he just got attacked by the guys with the hoods, the guys that saved your ass the other day.'\_

\_'The hood guys,' Oliver said.\_

\_'Yeah.'\_

\_'You didn't find them?' Oliver smiled. 'I'm gonna offer a reward. Hey, everybody!' He turned to the crowd and held up two fingers. 'Two million dollars to anybody that can find a nut bar in a green hood or a red hood!' The crowd cheered in response and Oliver turned back to Lance.\_

\_ 'Did you even try to save her?' the older man demanded in a low, harsh voice. Oliver's good mood vanished instantly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Perfect, Dad," Sara muttered sourly. "You just had to poke the bear." Quentin scowled at his younger daughter.<p>

Dr. Stein leaned forward and said, "Quentin, you need to consider your relationship with Oliver very carefully. You know he wasn't responsible for your daughter's death, and your behavior here -" he gestured to the screen " - does you no credit. As Sara has pointed out, it was her decision to go on the **\*\*Gambit\*\***. Oliver is not entirely to blame. You let your hatred and grief fester for five years and it's eating you away inside. Don't let it consume you completely."

Caitlin clapped slowly. "Well said, Dr. Stein."

Instead of retorting angrily at Dr. Stein's statement, Quentin looked thoughtful as he leaned back in his seat.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Hilton stepped between the two, pushing Lance away lightly with a hand to the chest. 'OK. Let's go, partner.'

\_Lance was not to be deterred. 'Did you even try to save my daughter?'

\_Hilton nudged him back. 'Sara wouldn't want this.'

\_'It's not -'

\_'Partner, let's go.' Hilton lowered his voice. 'It's all right. Let's go.'

\_Oliver was stone faced as Hilton steered Lance away. Tommy watched him closely; the crowd had gone silent.\_

\_Finally Oliver roused, climbed onto the stage, and called with forced cheerfulness, 'It's way too quiet in here! This is a party!' The crowd roared and the revelry resumed. Tommy came up to Oliver as he left the stage.\_

\_'Some coincidence,' his friend said. 'I mean, you asking to have your party here, and Hunt getting robbed right next door - and by the same guys who rescued us at the warehouse.'

\_'If I were you, Tommy, I'd just be glad you're alive,' Oliver advised flatly as Tommy drank from his glass.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Wh-What?" Cisco sputtered. "What did you mean by that?" Everyone else turned to Oliver with varying expressions of disbelief and confusion.<p>

Oliver sighed and glanced at Matthew. His brother shrugged in

resignation, his look saying, \_May as well get it over with\_. Oliver took a deep breath and looked his friend in the eye. "Tommy, do you remember when you were in Hong Kong a few years ago?"

Tommy nodded slowly. "I do. I took Dad's private jet -" he ignored the glare Malcolm gave him " - because someone accessed your email from there."

"It was us, Tommy," Matthew said bluntly. Walter's eyebrows shot up as Moira gasped. Thea stared at her twin in shock. He sighed. "We were only on Lian Yu for two years. Eventually we were picked up and taken to Hong Kong, but we couldn't come home. Instead the head of a US organization 'recruited' us, and I use that term loosely, into the ranks. We were forced to do the organization's bidding, or our family would pay the price."

Thea went white and Joe swore softly. Quentin looked mildly furious. Laurel stared at Matthew in disbelief. Iris had a hand over her mouth.

"What happened, Matthew?" Malcolm asked, a hard edge creeping into his voice.

The teen looked Malcolm straight in the eyes. "Our assigned 'handler' told us that we had to kill Tommy after he arrived in Hong Kong looking for us, or we would be killed instead." Quentin cursed as Tommy paled, looking back and forth between his surrogate brothers. "The organization's leader wanted no one to know that Oliver and Matthew Queen were still alive, so Tommy had to be eliminated."

"I knew I wouldn't do it," Oliver continued, "but we had to satisfy the woman we worked for. So I came up with the idea to kidnap Tommy and get him discreetly out of Hong Kong so he could not be used as leverage."

"That was you?" Tommy interjected.

Oliver nodded. "I'm sorry we couldn't reveal ourselves to you then, Tommy, but it was too dangerous."

"ARGUS," Diggle said suddenly. The brothers whipped their heads around. "ARGUS recruited you, didn't they? Amanda Waller," he practically spat in disgust.

Oliver nodded. "How did you guess, Mr. Diggle?"

"Because my ex-wife works for ARGUS," the bodyguard said flatly. "Waller is a ruthless woman and not to be trusted. I'm surprised you managed to escape her clutches."

"Oh, we didn't, not for a while," Matthew corrected.

An uneasy silence fell, the rest of the viewing party grappling with what they had been told. Finally the recording started again.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Tommy stared at his friend as if he didn't know him. 'Wh - What happened to you on that island?' he asked haltingly.<em>

\_ 'A lot,' Oliver replied and walked off, leaving Tommy behind.\_

\_The following morning Adam Hunt paced in his office, snapping into the phone at his accountant. Workmen were stretching a tarp over the broken window. 'What the hell are you talking about? Forty million dollars doesn't just up and vanish!' He scoffed at the reply. 'Untraceable?! It is forty million dollars! Find it!' He cut the connection and slammed the phone down on the desk before sinking into his chair with his head in his hands, defeated. 'How did they do it?' He failed to notice that the arrow Oliver had sent into the wall the previous night had an electronic device attached to it; the indicator light blinked green.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You made good on your promise," Felicity said. She smiled at Oliver. "And in a quite brazen way too. I approve."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the Foundry, the brothers watched as the money from Hunt International was transferred to the anonymous account Oliver had set up, then from there back to the accounts of the people Hunt had stolen it from. Matthew smiled smugly as Oliver crossed Adam Hunt's name off the List - but the smile faded as he stared pensively at the QC pamphlet lying beside the computer.<em>

\_\*\*Five Years Ago - 2007 - Queen's Gambit life raft, adrift in the North China Sea\*\*\_

\_The crewman dozed across from the others, perched on the side of the raft with a knife held loosely in his hand. Oliver slept with his head against his father's shoulder. Matthew lay with his head in Robert's lap and his legs propped against the side of the raft.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew stiffened and pulled back into himself as he stared into the distance, not really seeing anything. Talia noticed his reaction and leaned closer, watching him worriedly as she laid a hand on his arm. He twitched slightly but did not otherwise respond. Oliver closed his eyes as the grief welled up in his heart once again. Nyssa slid her arm around Sara's shoulders and pulled her close, pressing a light kiss to her temple as she felt the younger woman shudder.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There's not enough for all of us,' Robert whispered.<em>

\_ 'Save your strength,' Oliver said weakly.\_

\_ 'You can survive this,' his father insisted. 'Make it home, make it better. Right my wrongs. But you got to live through this first.' Oliver did not respond, prompting Robert to shake him lightly. 'You hear me, Ollie? You hear me, son?'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, Robert," Moira murmured. Thea gripped her mother's hand

tightly.<p>

Malcolm had a strong suspicion as to what was going to happen. He quickly glanced at Robbie and saw the boy was sound asleep, but who knew if he would wake in the next few minutes? He started to rise to take the boy on his lap, but Clark Kent was beside him instantly. "He won't wake, Mr. Merlyn," the Kryptonian said, his voice barely audible in Malcolm's ear. "Even if he does, he won't see anything. Hal and I made sure of that." Malcolm looked at the man in mild confusion, but Kent offered no explanation as he returned to his seat.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Just rest, Dad,' Oliver slurred, dozing off once more.  
<em>

\_Determination crept into Robert's eyes. 'No.' He pressed a light kiss to Oliver's forehead, then propped him up against the side of the raft. He looked down at Matthew, who still slept, and kissed the boy before lowering him to the bottom of the raft. Eyeing the crewman, Robert reached into his life jacket \_

\_- and pulled out a gun. The crewman had no time to react before Robert shot him. With a scream the man toppled into the ocean, dead. Both brothers woke and scrambled back from their father in horror. 'Dad?!!' Oliver exclaimed.\_

\_Robert looked at his sons. 'Survive,' he said, then pressed the gun to his temple and pulled the trigger.\_

\_'No!' Matthew screamed.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirira gasped and turned away from the screen, closing her eyes as tears spilled down her cheeks. Walter stood and embraced his wife, resting his chin on her hair as he fought to control his own emotions. Thea was crying openly; Tommy drew her to his side, his own eyes glistening and his face white. Malcolm bowed his head, silently mouthing the League prayer for the souls of the dead.<p>

Quentin cursed silently. Never had he expected Robert Queen to do something like this. Sacrificing his own life to ensure his sons lived ... it shook him to the core. Laurel leaned against her father, seeking the reassuring warmth of his touch; he slid his arm around her.

Felicity had a hand over her mouth as she wept. Roy was grim faced as he stared at the screen. Diggle kept a stoic expression on his face, but inside he was remembering the day the news had come of his brother's death.

Joe held Iris close, comforting her, his own expression a mask to hide the feelings raging inside. Barry's expression was one of pure shock and grief, while Henry closed his eyes, unable to bear looking at Robert's body. Cisco was pale and shaking. Ronnie's jaw dropped in shock and Caitlin gave a low moan of distress. Martin Stein shook his head sadly, wondering what had so haunted Robert that he had felt driven to make this choice for himself and his family. Eddie had a

stricken look on his face; in that moment Robert Queen was, to him, a more honorable man than his own father was.

After two or three minutes, the rest of the viewing party became aware of a low voice. It was Dusan al Ghul, speaking in Arabic. His father, sisters, Sara, and Malcolm all bowed their heads. The others turned to him in questioning wonder as he continued, then a moment later he switched to English.

"Excuse him and pardon him ... forgive and have mercy upon him ... make honorable his reception ... protect him from the punishment of the grave ... and the torment of the Fire."

Ra's turned to Moira. "An Arabic prayer for the soul of the deceased," he said gravely, seeing the question in her eyes. "Your husband, whatever his sins, was a man of honor to the last. He willingly gave his life to ensure that his sons, your sons, would survive. Take comfort in that, Mrs. Queen, and never let young Robert forget what kind of man his father was."

"Thank you," Moira whispered. She wanted to say more, but emotion overwhelmed her. Thea sniffed and managed a faint smile.

Once everyone had sufficiently composed themselves, Hal Jordan said quietly, "We're almost to the end of this recording. Four more and we'll call it a day."

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_A low tone roused the brothers from their thoughts, signaling the money transfers had ended.\_

\_That afternoon and evening at CNRI, Laurel and Joanna fielded calls from happy, if puzzled, clients.\_

\_'If, hypothetically, fifty thousand dollars magically appeared in your bank account, it might be best for you not to speak about it,' Laurel said as Joanna approached her desk. 'To anyone. Ever.' She listened to the reply and smiled. 'God bless you, too,' she said before ending the call.\_

\_'I just got a very grateful phone call from one of our clients against Adam Hunt,' Joanna said.\_

\_'Me, too,' Laurel replied, and they both laughed.\_

\_'It looks like Starling City has a guardian angel.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin barely restrained a scoff at Joanna's words. <em>Guardian angel, hell.<em>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Joanna glanced behind her. 'By the way, your cute friend's here,' she said slyly.<em>

\_Thinking she was talking about Oliver, Laurel stood and looked across the room - to see Tommy Merlyn standing there with a smile.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, God," Felicity muttered. "Are you stalking her?" Tommy glowered at the woman.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later Laurel accompanied Tommy back to the alley where his car waited. 'You left the party pretty quick last night. Even after I made sure the bar was stocked with Pinot Noir.'<em>

\_ 'It wasn't really my scene,' Laurel told him.\_

\_ 'I thought maybe you and Oliver went mano-a-mano again. I saw you two head out.' \_

\_ 'There's nothing between Oliver and I,' Laurel said with finality. 'Not anymore.' \_

\_ 'Here I thought the only thing between you and Oliver was us.' \_

\_ 'I wouldn't exactly characterize us as an 'us', Tommy,' Laurel replied. Tommy stopped and turned to face her.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What?" Lance sputtered in shock. He turned to Laurel. "You're seeing him?"<p>

Laurel met his gaze evenly. "My romantic life is my own business, Dad."

"Well, yeah, but him?" Tommy glared at Lance, but the Detective wasn't fazed. "What is it with you and bad boys like him and Queen?" Oliver glared at Quentin. "I thought you would have learned your lesson by now, Laurel."

"Dad," Sara interjected, leaning forward, "I suggest you drop it." Fuming, her father turned his attention back to the screen.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Then what would you call it?' he asked.<em>

\_ 'A lapse.' \_

\_ 'That's quite a few lapses,' Tommy said with a grin. 'Your place, my place, my place again -' they both laughed.\_

\_ 'Oh, come on, Merlyn,' Laurel said with a smile. 'We both know that you're not a one girl type of guy.' \_

\_ 'Depends on the girl.' \_

\_ 'I have to go back to work,' she finally said, turning to head back to CNRI.\_



\_ 'Dinah Laurel Lance,' Tommy called. 'Always trying to save the world.' Laurel turned back to him.\_

\_ 'Hey. If I don't try and save it, who will?' She left as Tommy got behind the wheel of his car and drove away. Unknown to either of them Oliver, in his Arrow gear, was perched on a fire escape high above and had seen it all.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Now who's stalking who?" Cisco muttered. Oliver growled at him and the young man raised his hands defensively. "Sorry, sorry. Forget I said anything." Ronnie leaned over and smacked Cisco across the back of the head. Grumbling as he felt for welts, Cisco slumped back in his chair.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'She says the island changed me. She has no idea how much.'<em>

\_\*\*Five Years Ago - 2007 - Queen's Gambit life raft, in sight of Lian Yu\*\*\_

\_The exhausted castaways pulled themselves up the sides of the raft, looking out to where Lian Yu waited in the distance.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Purgatory," Oliver said softly as he watched the screen. "The boy I was died there and a man took his place."<p>

" 'Kill the boy and let the man be born,' " Matthew quoted just as softly.

Chills danced down the spines of everyone else in the room; even those who had not read the books recognized the quote from George RR Martin's \*\*A Song of Ice and Fire\*\* series. They were beginning to realize just how true it was for Oliver and Matthew Queen.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There are many more names on the List, those who rule our city through intimidation and fear. Every last one of them will wish we had died on that island.'<em>

\*\*\_2012\_\*\*

\_At the mansion a darkly dressed man walked down the steps toward the rear garden where another figure waited for him. 'The police failed to identify the men I hired to kidnap Oliver, and they never will. Should we arrange another abduction?'\_

\_ 'No,' Moira replied as she turned to look across the grounds. 'There are other ways of finding out what my sons know.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hell?" Matthew exploded, standing and glaring at his

mother. "How could you stoop so low as to mastermind Oliver's kidnapping? What are you trying to hide?" Oliver and Thea were on their feet now too, Oliver's gaze boring into Moira while Thea stared at her in fear and loathing.<p>

Moira sighed and carefully avoided looking in Malcolm's direction. "I did what I had to do to keep you safe."

"To keep us safe?" Matthew laughed humorlessly. "I don't believe you. Did you have anything to do with the \*\*Gambit\*\*?" he demanded. "With Dad? Did you murder your own husband?"

His accusation cut Moira to the quick, but she managed to keep her voice steady as she answered, "No, Matthew. I had nothing to do with your father's death. It was not until after the Gambit went down that I became involved."

"With what, Mom?" Oliver demanded. "What are you hiding?"

"Oliver," Clark Kent said quietly as he rose, "calm down. Taking your anger out on your mother will not help matters. There is far more going on here than you know or can guess. Let the recordings show what really happened."

Oliver glared at the man but finally ground out, "Fine." He gave his mother a baleful look as he sat back down. Matthew followed suit as Thea and Tommy joined them, neither wishing to sit close to Moira any longer. Most of the others were eyeing the woman with expressions ranging from shock to disgust to horror while the League of Assassins members merely looked contemplative.

"Let's continue." Arthur Curry signaled the control room to load the next recording.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) A gracious thank you to \*\*Naitch03 \*\*for allowing me to use his transcripts as a baseline for my own.\_

\_2.) The photo of \*\*Robert Queen \*\*on the newscast at the beginning of this episode gives his birth year as \*\*1948,\*\* then \*\*Honor Thy Father \*\*immediately reestablished it as \*\*1958. \*\*I'm going with the latter date.\_

### 3. Episode II: Honor Thy Father

\_\*\*Five Years Ago - 2007 - North China Sea\*\*\_

\_Oliver thrashed wildly in the surging ocean, screaming for Sara.\_

\_ 'The day we went missing ...' \_

\_The brothers stumbled ashore on Lian Yu.\_

\_ ' ... was the day we died.' \_

\* \* \*

><p><em>How true that was, <em>Martin Stein thought. He looked back at the young men. Though they had only seen one recording so far, he could already tell that the Oliver and Matthew Queen in the room were far different than the ones in the flashbacks on screen. They had matured beyond the spoiled playboy and child they had been when the yacht went down. He had to suppress a wince as he thought of how cocky and arrogant he himself had been in his young adulthood. Hard lessons had been learned before he had shown that same maturity, but the brothers' lesson had been harder, and possibly at greater cost to them.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_In the Foundry the two were gearing up for a night on Starling's streets. 'Five years in hell forged us into a weapon, which we use to honor a vow we made to our father, who sacrificed his life for ours.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea sniffed at the reminder of her father's death. Matthew leaned over and rested his hand on hers. She laced her fingers through his, the warmth and gentle strength of his grip comforting her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>On the computer screens behind them two newspaper headlines were visible.<em>

\*\*\_Lost at Sea\_\*\*

\*\*\_Starling City Billionaire Laid to Rest\_\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm's lips tightened as he recalled the day of the memorial service. It had been a rainy, windy September day, and he had stood close to the grieving Moira and Thea, playing the part of a good friend mourning the loss of another friend, but inwardly he had been glad that Robert was dead and could no longer hinder his plans.<p>

Then, only a few weeks later, he had learned of Moira's pregnancy with Robbie and Matthew's face began to haunt his dreams at night.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'In his final moments he told us the truth: that our family's wealth had been built on the suffering of others. That he failed our city, and that it was up to us to save it and right his wrongs.'<em>

\_Both paused a moment, staring off into space with grim expressions. Oliver laid a hand on his brother's shoulder. 'Are you ready?' A curt nod was Matthew's only reply.\_

\_'But to do that without endangering the people closest to us, we have to be someone else. We have to be - something else.' They lowered the hoods to cover their faces.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco turned to look at the brothers. "You know, I can make you a mask to help hide your face."<p>

"Thank you, Cisco," Oliver said dryly. "I'd like to talk to you about it later, but not now." Cisco looked like Oliver had kicked his puppy at that, but Oliver gave him a reassuring smile to soothe his ruffled feelings.

Moira smiled at the interaction between her sons on screen. It was good to see Oliver and Matthew so close. She had worried that Oliver's bad habits would influence Matthew as he got older, but it seemed his time on the island had completely changed Oliver; she could only hope his new attitude would influence Thea as well.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The archers stood on a rooftop landing pad as half a dozen armed guards rushed forward. A chopper hovered nearby with lights flashing. Shouts rang out in the night. 'Who's that? Where'd they come from? '<em>

\_'What's going on? '\_

\_ 'Get the chopper back now! '\_

\_'Who are these guys? '\_

\_The vigilantes brought the guards down in under a minute. As the last guard fell, they strode forward to confront their target - Marcus Redman. The man raised his hands. 'Whoa, whoa! Easy, wait, wait! '\_

\_Matthew grabbed Redman by the shirt collar and threw him off the pad to land on an air conditioning unit a few feet below. He jumped down beside the man and broke the grille covering the unit with a single stomp of his boot before forcing Redman's head down perilously close to the spinning fan blades.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't want to see this," Cisco mumbled, looking green around the gills. Barry, too, looked disconcerted.<p>

Joe turned and glared at Matthew. "Really?! You would let a man be shredded to pieces like that?"

"It's intimidation, Detective West," Ra's cut in before the man could lash out further. "Young Matthew has no intention of killing this man, and if you think otherwise, you are a fool." Joe stared at the Demon's Head in disbelief, unable to believe he had been put so thoroughly in his place by a man who was the leader of a group of assassins.

"Much as I hate to admit it," Henry added, "Ra's is right. They left Adam Hunt alive instead of killing him, Joe. I admit I don't like some of their methods either, but since Starling's police and law seem unwilling to crack down on their corrupt businessmen, perhaps Oliver and Matthew's vigilante activities will put some of them behind bars for good."

"Not all cops in Starling are corrupt, Mr. Allen," Quentin Lance interjected sharply.

"I know that, Detective Lance," Henry replied calmly, "but can you look me in the eye and tell me honestly that all of the police officers at the SCPD are committed to the pursuit of justice like you, Joe, and Eddie are?" The two men stared at each other for several seconds while the others watched in silence.

"No," Quentin finally admitted reluctantly. "You're right, Mr. Allen. I just - this goes against everything I learned at the academy, everything I taught Laurel."

"I understand, Detective - believe me - but having been a victim of injustice myself, I am not as jaded as you are."

An uneasy silence fell as the three cops mulled over Henry's words. Even Laurel looked thoughtful as the recording resumed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Marcus Redman,' he growled as Oliver jumped down beside him, 'you have failed this city.'<em>

\_'Please, don't! Please! Don't!' Redman cried in terror as Oliver leaned in.\_

\_'Cell phone, inside pocket, call your partner. Tell him to give those pensioners back their money. Do it now!' he snapped. Matthew twisted his fingers in Redman's hair, eliciting another scream from the man. \_

\_'OK,' Redman finally gasped.\_

\_Matthew abruptly released his hold and the vigilantes left, leaving Redman slumped over the unit.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco sighed in relief, some of the color returning to his face. Ronnie was no less relieved, but wondered how many more times they would see something like this happen.<p>

Laurel winced and looked back at Matthew. "That was brutal, Matt." The teen met her accusing stare with a stony one of his own, but said nothing.

Sara snorted and eyed her sister with disdain. "Please stop that, Laurel. If you can't handle Matthew using intimidation, you may as well leave, because we're going to see more of it and you can't be squeamish." She gave her father and Joe a pointed look, telling them the message was meant for them as well. Quentin glared at his younger daughter, but had to wonder if she was talking about herself as well.

He hoped not - he didn't think he could handle it if his baby girl had turned into a killer.

"Sara's right, Laurel," Matthew said as he leaned forward. "I won't deny I'm not proud of some of the things I've done so far, but that was what Amanda Waller and ARGUS trained me to be. Slade -" a grimace crossed his face as his eyes slid to Moira, who had gone rigid " - started our training, but it was ARGUS who finished it. Without Slade, we would have had no chance of surviving after the first few weeks on Lian Yu." Laurel was stunned into silence by his admission that he took no pleasure in what he did - she had thought that he didn't care at all about the lives of those he had hurt and killed. \_I misjudged him, \_she thought regretfully.

"There's another point too," Malcolm said quietly. "By leaving Hunt and Redman alive but taking their money, Oliver and Matthew are not only ridding Starling of scum, but also preventing a power vacuum that the gangs in the Glades would rush to fill."

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning the brothers entered the mansion's sitting room where their mother, siblings and stepfather waited. A news broadcast was in progress.<em>

\_ 'Over the past fifteen years, Mr. Redman has withdrawn more than thirty million dollars from the plan's account. Mr. Redman claims refunding the Halcyon pension plan has always been his intent. But sources say Redman was coerced by the vigilantes.' The familiar sketch of the Hoods appeared and Oliver gestured to it.\_

\_ 'These guys get more airtime than the Kardashians, right?' he said lightly.\_

\_ Matthew snorted and muttered, 'Disgusting trash,' as he crossed the room to stand by his mother's chair.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"For once I agree with you, Matthew. The Kardashians are trashy. I never liked them," Joe said, surprising everyone in the room but Iris and Barry.<p>

Iris chuckled. "One night when reporters were talking about the Kardashians on the news, Dad completely lost his temper and started shouting at the TV. I'm surprised the neighbors didn't come knocking." Joe rolled his eyes, but a small smile twisted his lips. Barry snickered in amusement, for he had been at the West house that night and had had to listen to Joe's rant. Cisco, Caitlin, Ronnie, Thea, Tommy, Roy, Felicity, and Laurel all laughed. Moira, Henry, and Stein shook their heads.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Five years on an island and you still know who they are,' Thea mocked.<em>

\_ 'I've been catching up,' Oliver replied glibly. 'It's nice to see how much our culture has improved while I was away.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco grinned. "Oh, yeah. The Marvel movies. Game of Thrones ..."<p>

"Cisco," Eddie interrupted, "you know that's not what Oliver meant."

"Well, yeah," Cisco said defensively, "but still ..."

By this point Thea, Laurel, and Tommy were staring at Cisco in disbelief. "You watch Game of Thrones?" Thea asked incredulously.

"Of course," Cisco shot back. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Perhaps because it borders on pornographic?" Quentin Lance said snidely. "I've seen a little of the show, but honestly, the sex is too much at times." Cisco turned crimson. Laurel and Iris looked uncomfortable with the cop's blunt statement - while they enjoyed the show, they had to agree that sometimes the sex did go overboard. Tommy, on the other hand, had never particularly cared how risquÃ© the sex scenes were. Walter pursed his lips in disapproval as he looked at Thea. The teenager shook her head in denial.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'But the city used to be different,' Moira interjected. 'People used to feel safe.'<em>

\_'Aw, what's the matter, Mom?' Thea asked sarcastically. 'Afraid we're gonna be next?' Robbie reached for his sister and she picked him up.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew leaned forward. "We would never go after you or Walter, Mom ... unless you give us cause." His voice turned cold on the last words. Shocked stares from everyone but Ra's and Nyssa greeted his statement.<p>

"What the hell?" Eddie finally sputtered. "You would go after your own family?"

"We wouldn't hurt Mom or Walter," Matthew emphasized, "but if we found out they did know about whatever our father was involved in, then yes, we would question them as the vigilantes."

"That's a low thing to do, Queen," Joe snapped.

Matthew glared at the Detective. "Lest you forget, Joe, my father was tangled up in \_something \_in Starling that led to his death and Oliver and I to spend five years in hell. He asked us to right his wrongs and we will do it ... even if it means taking down the ones we love." He turned to Moira. "Mom, please. You already admitted you know something. Don't hide it from us. For our sakes, and for yours, please."

Moira was conflicted. She desperately wanted to tell them what was going on. Her children deserved to know. Yet she did not want her

sons going after Malcolm, especially not here. "I'll tell you later," she said finally. At the skeptical looks from both her children and Walter, she added, "I promise."

"I will hold you to that, Moira," Walter said quietly. He gave his wife a level stare. "All these years I had my suspicions about the \*\*Gambit, \*\*but I never directly acted on them."

Caitlin shook her head incredulously, unable to believe what she was hearing. It was becoming more and more obvious to her that the Queen family was seriously dysfunctional. Her gaze slid to Malcolm Merlyn, then she looked back at Tommy. \_Are the Merlyns and the Lances the same?\_ she wondered.

Similar thoughts preoccupied Joe and Henry. Henry was glad that he had been able to maintain a relationship with his son despite his imprisonment in Iron Heights. He shuddered to think what might have happened if Barry had cut all contact with him after Nora's murder.

Joe shook his head in disbelief. Clearly their friends from Starling were more jaded than he had first thought.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Do either of you have any questions about today?' Walter asked as Moira stood. 'It's a simple proof-of-life declaration. Just read out a brief, prepared statement to the judge, and then your death in absentia judgements will be voided.'

\_Matthew shook his head. 'We've already discussed it.'\_

\_'It's fine, Walter. I've been in a courtroom before,' Oliver said with a grim smile.\_

\_'Four times by my estimate,' Tommy interrupted as he entered the room. 'You know, there was the DUI, the assault on that paparazzi douchebag, stealing that taxi, which was just awesome, by the way, and who could forget peeing on the cop?'

\_By this point Oliver looked mildly embarrassed as Moira shook her head and Matthew muttered, 'Not in front of Robbie, please.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira glared at Tommy as he laughed. "You peed on a cop?" Iris asked, giving Oliver an incredulous look.<p>

The young man sighed and muttered, "Yes."

"Guess who that cop was?" Quentin Lance interjected, glowering at Oliver. Laurel and Sara had to bite back smiles at that; though the incident itself had not been funny, the fact that it was their father Oliver had done it to was amusing.

Ronnie sounded mildly amused as he said, "What possessed you to do that, Queen?"

Oliver shrugged. "Call it an act of rebellion."



"Against the expectations your parents had for you?" Caitlin said shrewdly. He nodded, but gave the woman a hard look, warning her not to press the issue. Caitlin had, in fact, been about to do precisely that, but reconsidered on seeing his expression.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I wish everyone would,' Moira said stiffly as Walter helped her into her jacket.<em>

\_'I'd hang, but we're headed to court,' Oliver interrupted, laying a hand on Tommy's shoulder.\_

\_'I know, that's why I'm here. My best friend is getting legally resurrected. I wouldn't miss this for the world,' Tommy said with a smile.\_

\_Oliver sighed and looked at Thea. 'What about you?'\_

\_'Oh, I think the first four times of you in court was enough for me,' she said tersely.\_

\_'Fair enough,' Oliver muttered.\_

\_Matthew caught his sister by the arm before she could leave. 'Would you come for me?' he asked quietly.\_

\_She stared at him. 'I don't -'\_

\_'Please, Thea. This is going to be difficult for me. I've always been there for you. Be there for me now. Please.'\_

\_After a moment she said, 'I'll come, Matt.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Caitlin leaned forward. "Going with him was the best decision you could have made, Thea. Both your brothers need your support, not just Matthew."<p>

"I agree," Dr. Stein added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>He hugged her and whispered, 'Thank you,' blinking back the tears that threatened to fall. Robbie, who was still in Thea's arms, leaned forward and curled one arm around Matthew's neck. The teen chuckled weakly and slid his own arm around his brother's small shoulders. The three stayed like that until Diggle's voice interrupted them.<em>

\_'Mrs. Queen? Car's ready.'\_

\_Moira nodded and gave Tommy a hard look as he offered his arm to her. Ignoring his gesture, she took her husband's arm instead and they left the room with the twins and Robbie right behind. Tommy jokingly offered his arm to Oliver, who only smirked and walked out. With a shrug of his shoulders Tommy followed his friend.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco snickered, prompting Tommy to give him a poisonous glare. For once, though, the younger man was not fazed. "Oh, come on. That was pretty funny." Tommy huffed and settled back in his seat as Thea, Laurel, Sara, Felicity, and Iris tried to hide their smiles.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>On their arrival at the courthouse the brothers waded through the sea of shouting reporters.<em>

\_ 'Are you going to testify as to what happened when the yacht sank?' \_

\_ 'Are you going to talk about the boat crash?' \_

\_ 'Matthew, are you going into a psychiatric facility for treatment?' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Nosy scum!" Matthew exploded, startling everyone with his vehemence. "How do they get away with making such outlandish claims?" Walter snorted in disgust and Moira glared at the screen.<p>

"Sensationalist tabloid seeking trash," Iris spat, earning raised eyebrows from everyone but her father and Barry. Joe smiled slightly at the fire in his daughter's tone.

"Greedy vultures," Malcolm snarled. "Never liked them."

Talia, Dusan, and Nyssa stared at the screen in disgust. "Are all journalists like this?" Nyssa asked.

"Most in the United States are," Iris replied. "There are some who report the news honestly and fairly, but they are few and far between." She gave Nyssa a wry look. "This may sound surprising since I'm a journalist myself, but these days sensationalist news gets people more excited than honest reporting."

"It probably would have been better if you had gone into the courthouse through the back entrance," Dr. Stein said. "That way you could have avoided the press."

Moira nodded. "You're right, Dr. Stein."

"There's something else, too," Oliver said with a scowl. "If any of the papers dare to print anything like that when we get back, I'm going to sue them. It's one thing to print stories about me, but I won't have Matthew be the target of their brand of reporting."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oliver, did you see Sara Lance die?'<em>

\_ Oliver recalled the cabin tilting and watching helplessly as Sara was swept away by the ocean.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara, Quentin, and Laurel all snarled angrily. "I wish you had punched him, Queen," the cop said. "I would have."<p>

Nyssa was none too pleased with the reporter's invasive question either, but she noted how Detective Lance still cared deeply about Taer-al-Safer, even after her presumed death. That was far more than Ra's had ever done. She glanced at the younger woman and saw the relaxed smile on her face. The sight was touching, for Nyssa had not seen her lover smile in Nanda Parbat unless they were alone - which was rare.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few minutes later they stood before the judge with grim expressions. Oliver spoke for them both. 'There was a storm. The boat went down. We were the only survivors.' He remembered screaming for Sara as the yacht sank. 'Our father didn't make it.'<em>

\_Matthew abruptly recalled screaming 'No!' as Robert killed himself.\_

\_Moira wept softly as Oliver continued. Thea was near tears as well; Walter slipped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. Even Robbie sensed the gravity of the moment, for he sat perfectly still on Moira's lap. Tommy and the rest of the spectators listened in somber silence. 'We almost died; we thought that we had, because we spent so many days on that life raft before we saw land.'\_

\_Matthew recalled their first sight of Lian Yu and staggering ashore on the rocks.\_

\_'When we reached it, I knew - I knew that I was going to have to live for both of us. And in those five years, it was that one thought that kept me going.'\_

\_The lawyer stood after Oliver finished. 'Your Honor, we move to vacate the death-in-absentia filed after Oliver and Matthew's disappearance at sea aboard the \*\*Queen's Gambit\*\* five years ago.' She joined them at the front of the room.\_

\_Matthew turned to look at his mother as the lawyer continued, 'Unfortunately we will not be requesting that the declaration of death filed for the petitioners' father, Robert Queen, be rescinded. The Queen family is only entitled to one miracle, I'm afraid.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, sure," Matthew muttered, but everyone heard his voice crack. Talia leaned over and wrapped her arms around him; he held her tightly, his face against her shoulder.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>When they left the courtroom a little while later, Moira forced a cheerful tone as they headed downstairs. 'Now, on to the offices. Everyone is waiting to meet you there.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Before Caitlin could say anything, Dr. Stein intervened. "Mrs. Queen, forgive me for saying this, but that was the worst decision you could have made." Moira turned to him with a glare, but he continued, "Did it not occur to you that your sons might prefer to go home after giving their statement to the judge instead of being pushed to go to the company immediately afterward?" By this point Moira was looking mildly ashamed as she realized he was right. "It would have been better to wait a day or two before visiting Queen Consolidated."<p>

"You latched on to Oliver saying that he wanted to stop by the offices as an excuse to push him into trying to do what you want him to do," Caitlin added. "You're not giving him - or Matthew - the time and space they need to reacclimatize to society after five years away, but trying to pretend everything has gone back to normal with their return."

Moira sighed and looked away from the two doctors. \_How could I have been so blind? \_she thought.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver and Matthew both stopped short on the stairs, forcing the rest of the group to stop as well. 'Uh, Mom,' Oliver said wearily, 'that was a little bit heavier than I was expecting it to be. Can we do that tomorrow? Please? '<em>

\_'I just want to go home,' Matthew added. Thea laid a hand on his arm.\_

\_Moira looked at Walter, who nodded, then back to her sons. 'Of course.'\_

\_'Thank you,' Oliver said. He turned to his brother. 'Matt, have Diggle take you, Thea, and Robbie home, then come back for me and Tommy.' The seventeen year old nodded and brushed past his mother and stepfather with Thea and Robbie close behind. Walter and Moira followed them. \_

\_Tommy stared at Oliver. 'Last week you couldn't wait to get to the company.'\_

\_'Tommy, I'd just spent five years away from civilization,' Oliver said as they continued down the stairs. 'I wasn't exactly thinking straight. I -' he stopped short as they reached the bottom of the stairs and ran - almost literally - into Laurel Lance and Joanna De La Vega, who had entered the courthouse in the company of a third woman.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oops," Thea muttered, shooting a look at Laurel. "Looks like you're going to be a bitch again." Laurel glared at her, then turned it on Roy as the young man laughed.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Hi,' Tommy said lamely.<em>

\_'What are you doing here?' Laurel demanded, looking at Oliver.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Miss Lance," Dusan said sarcastically. "He told you to stay away from him and you respond by lashing out. Well done." Laurel winced.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oh, they were bringing me back from the dead. Legally speaking,' Oliver said. Joanna and the stranger exchanged glances behind Laurel's back. 'What are you doing here?'<em>

\_'My job,' she replied curtly.\_

\_'Right,' he said with a grim smile.\_

\_'More like the DA's,' Joanna offered, trying to diffuse the tension. Oliver noticed the stranger and stepped past Laurel to shake her hand.\_

\_'Hi. Oliver Queen.'\_

\_'Emily Nocenti,' she replied.\_

\_'Oliver and his younger brother just got back from five years on an uncharted island,' Laurel told Emily, her eyes never leaving Oliver's. 'Before that, he was cheating on me with my sister. He was with her when she died. And last week he told me to stay away from him. It was really good advice,' she finished viciously before pushing past him. 'Excuse me.' Tommy pressed his lips together as Oliver clenched his teeth.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Iris leaned forward and hissed, "What possessed you to reveal all that to a complete stranger, Laurel? First, it was none of her business. Second, it was a spiteful thing to do. No matter your issues with Oliver, you had no right to do that." Laurel glared at the younger woman, who returned it with an icy one of her own.<p>

The silent staredown was interrupted as Quentin coughed and said, "Despite my issues with Queen, Laurel, Iris is correct. Yours and his relationship was none of Emily Nocenti's business."

Thea snorted. "Understatement much?"

"Oh, shut up," Laurel snapped. "You're not acting any better toward him, so just shut up!"

Thea went scarlet with anger, but Walter turned to her and said sternly, "Thea, don't antagonize Laurel." The girl sank back into her seat in a huff.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'It was nice to meet you,' Emily said awkwardly.<em>

\_ 'Yeah.' \_

\_The two women headed after Laurel. Once they were gone, Tommy sighed and lightly clapped Oliver on the shoulder. 'Come on, buddy, shake it off,' he said gently. 'Let's go.' \_

\_A swarm of reporters surrounded Martin Somers on the courthouse steps as Oliver and Tommy emerged. The two men paused to listen.\_

\_ 'Mr. Somers! Mr. Somers! What do you have to say about the accusations made by Laurel Lance?' one reporter called.\_

\_ 'I don't know what I've done to earn this witch hunt from Miss Lance and her bosses at the CNRI,' Somers said with a smile, 'but I can tell you this. I am an honest businessman, and I will fight this slander to my last dime and breath. That's all I have to say, thank you.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel snorted in disdain. "That's all you have to say?" she mocked. "Nice try, Somers. All of Starling City knows you're as crooked as they come." Sara and Felicity laughed at the older woman's snark.<p>

"Agreed," Malcolm added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Somers departed with several of the reporters trailing him, but a few spotted Oliver and Tommy at the top of the stairs. 'Oh, there's Mr. Queen.'<em>

\_ 'Mr. Queen, do you want to follow up?' \_

\_ 'What happened in there, sir?' \_

\_ Oliver ignored the shouted questions, pushing through the crowd with Tommy behind him. Diggle came to his side and led them toward the car. \_

\_ 'Tell us what happened inside, Mr. Queen!' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver growled low in his throat. Cisco looked back at him, but wisely said nothing.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Step back everybody, please,' Diggle barked, but the reporters turned a deaf ear.<em>

\_ 'Can you give us a couple comments about the island, Mr. Queen? Before you go, sir, please.' \_

\_ 'Couple of comments about the island, sir.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"You don't want to hear about the island the Chinese call 'Purgatory,' believe me," Matthew said darkly. "You wouldn't think it was romantic if you had been marooned there."<p>

"He's right," Sara said grimly. "Lian Yu may have been beautiful, but it was no paradise." She shuddered. "When Nyssa found me after the \*\*Amazo\*\*, I didn't care what might happen to me as long as I could leave that cursed island behind."

Nyssa smiled and gently brushed a strand of hair back from Sara's forehead. "I remember well how calmly you accepted your fate. You did not beg for your life to be spared as others would have done. In that moment I could see the spine of steel and knew that you would find your place in the League." Sara rested her head on Nyssa's shoulder, closing her eyes against the tears that threatened to fall.

Oliver looked at Sara with regret and guilt in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Sara," he whispered. "Matt and I were knocked out after the \*\*Amazo\*\* and didn't wake up until we were in Hong Kong."

Sara shook her head. "You're not responsible, Ollie. It was all Slade."

"Christ," Quentin swore softly. "You shouldn't have had to endure that, Sara."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What happened in there?'

\_Diggle opened the Bentley's rear passenger door to allow the still silent Oliver to climb inside. He shut the door and tried to push the reporters back. 'Everybody, step back.' One reporter pressed forward with his camera and Diggle shoved him back. 'Hey, man, I'll make you swallow that Nikon. Back!'\_

\_At that moment a screech of tires sounded as Oliver sped away, leaving Tommy and Diggle standing with the press.\_

\_Tommy glanced at the bodyguard. 'This happens to you a lot, doesn't it?' he asked glibly. Diggle pressed his lips together.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laughter erupted from all of the younger crowd at how effortlessly Oliver had slipped the leash ... again. Diggle turned and glared at Oliver, who only arched an amused eyebrow.<p>

Moira shook her head in exasperation. "Oliver, promise me you won't do this if I hire Mr. Diggle when we get back." Oliver gave his mother a flat stare.

"As I said, Mom, I don't need a bodyguard. Matt and I have been watching out for each other for five years. If you insist on hiring him when we return, then hire him to be Thea and Robbie's bodyguard." The teen started to voice an outraged protest, but Oliver didn't let her finish. "I'm serious, Thea. Matt and I won't be able to protect you or Robbie all the time." He glanced at his brother, still sleeping on their mother's lap. "Mr. Diggle can protect you both from

harm."

"He's right," Malcolm said. "Thea, you and Robbie, aside from Tommy, are the most vulnerable of all of us from Starling. There are plenty of people who would have no compunction over using you or an innocent boy as a hostage or worse, especially if they found out Oliver or Matthew or both were the Arrows."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the courthouse, Laurel paced the courtroom floor as she delivered her opening remarks. 'How much is a life worth? A life of a man, a good man, a stevedore on the docks of the city in which we live.' She gestured to Victor Nocenti's portrait sitting on an easel. <em>

\_ 'A father. A man with a daughter.' She looked at Emily, as did Joanna. 'The plaintiff will prove by a preponderance of evidence that Victor Nocenti learned that his boss -' she backed away from the easel to Somers' table and pointed at him ' - that man sitting right there, Martin Somers, was taking bribes from the Chinese Triads to smuggle drugs into our city. And when Victor Nocenti threatened to tell the police, Martin Somers had him killed. Mr. Somers is very well connected, and has friends in the district attorney's office. Which is why, if Emily Nocenti is to get justice for her father's death, if Martin Somers is to get justice for his crimes, then someone is going to have to do it for them.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel slapped the arm of her chair angrily and turned to glare at their hosts. "Thanks a lot, Mr. Jordan. I didn't want Dad to find out about this!"<p>

Everyone in the Central City party stared at Laurel in disbelief. Most of the Starling group looked startled as well, while Quentin was absolutely livid. However, it was Ra's who voice what they were all thinking. "If you insist on pursuing this case, Miss, Lance, you should be very careful," he advised, "for Taer-al-Safer's sake." Sara blinked in surprise at the Demon's Head. Seeing Laurel and Quentin's confusion on hearing the strange name, Ra's clarified, "Taer-al-Safer is the name that Sara Lance is known by among the League. It means 'The Canary'." Sara smiled wistfully and Laurel's eyes glistened as they both recalled the canary Sara had gotten for her tenth birthday. The Demon's Head continued, "I have heard Taer-al-Safer speak of you and her father in conversations with my daughter. The Triads are dangerous, Miss Lance. Even the League will not confront them unless absolutely necessary."

"She won't be continuing with the case," Quentin growled.

Laurel glared at her father. "Like you can stop me."

Before the Detective could vent his fury, Malcolm interceded. "Laurel, you, Miss Nocenti, and everyone else involved with the case could become targets if the Triad is stirred up enough. Do you want that to happen?"

The young woman turned pale and finally muttered, "No."



"Malcolm's right," Oliver said quietly. "Laurel, you're going after Somers openly; when Matt and I tangled with the Triad in Hong Kong, no one knew who we were because the world thought we were dead. There's a difference there. You have to be careful, or you \_will \_get yourself and possibly Emily Nocenti killed."

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the Lair a shirtless Oliver pulled himself up a rope as Matthew sat at the computer. The notebook lay open to the page with Somers' name. After a few minutes Matthew stripped off his shirt and joined Oliver. The two sparred with escrima sticks, parrying each other's blows with split second precision as they danced around the room.<em>

\_'Martin Somers,' Oliver said as he lashed out at Matthew's right shoulder. The teen blocked it with ease and spun around to deliver a solid kick to Oliver's ribs. The older man grunted and staggered slightly, but warded off the blow Matthew aimed at his head. 'Laurel's targeted the worst of Starling City, so it's no surprise his name is on our father's list. The city's police and the DA can't stop him ... or won't. Laurel thinks she's the only one willing to bring him to justice. She's wrong.'\_

\_'It's pathetic that the wealthy in Starling won't follow our uncle's example,' Matthew remarked as he whipped a stick down toward Oliver's shoulder. Oliver brought his own stick up to parry ... and Matthew abruptly pulled back, spinning around once more to kick Oliver hard in the chest, sending his brother to the floor on his back. He immediately regained his feet as Matthew stepped away, breathing heavily. The teen shook his head and sweat droplets flew from his dark hair.\_

\_Oliver nodded. 'What I wonder is, why didn't Dad do that?'\_

\_'Maybe he tried and it failed.'\_

\_Oliver snorted. 'He must not have tried hard enough. But then, Uncle Thomas' work was undone not long after his death.'\_

\_Matthew sighed. 'When I become CEO, I intend to follow Uncle's lead and dedicate part of the company's resources to combating poverty, but even if it succeeds, there will still be a need for the Arrows in this city.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm glared at the screen. <em>What arrogance, <em>he thought. \_Does Matthew really think he can cure the ills that ail Starling this way?\_

Eddie turned to Matthew and gave him a nod of respect. "I've misjudged you, Matthew."

\* \* \*

><p><em>That night in his office on the docks, Somers railed at his lawyer. 'You, listen up. The longer this goes on, the more likely the media is gonna crucify me.' He poked a finger in the man's face. 'You shut this trial down, do you understand me?' Before the lawyer could

respond the lights abruptly went out and a whoosh was heard, followed by a cry. Twice more the sounds repeated before the lights came back on, revealing to Somers the sprawled bodies of the lawyer and two bodyguards. He looked up - then was grabbed from behind and his world went dark. <em>

\_When reality slowly filtered back into Somers' brain, he found himself hanging upside down from a crane - and standing in front of him were the vigilantes. The red hooded one growled, 'Martin Somers.' \_

\_ 'Who the hell are you?' Somers gasped. \_

\_ 'You've failed this city.' The archer nocked an arrow and drew his bow. \_

\_ 'No! No, no, no, no, no!' Somers screamed in panic as the archer fired, the arrow whizzing dangerously close to the magnate's head. \_

\_ The green hooded vigilante drew a bead on Somers and snapped, 'You're gonna testify in that trial. You're gonna confess to having Victor Nocenti killed.' Somers groaned. \_

\* \* \*

><p>"You really should consider using a voice changer, Ollie," Sara said, turning to look at him. "Just deepening your voice isn't enough."<p>

Talia shook her head. "I've been telling him that for weeks, but he won't listen to me." Oliver glowered at her and Talia snapped, "Seriously, Oliver. How do you expect to be able to operate in Starling if anyone who knows you can tell who you are by your voice?"

After a moment Oliver sighed and reluctantly admitted, "Perhaps you're right, Talia."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There won't be a second warning,'<em> \_the Scarlet Archer said coldly. His companion fired. The arrow sliced the side of Somers' face, leaving a deep gash in his cheek. Somers cried out in pain and pressed his hand against the cut. When he looked back at his tormentors again, they were gone. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel grinned viciously at the sight of Somers strung up. "Serves him right." Even her father, for all his dislike of Oliver, was impressed - they could have killed Somers, but had not.<p>

Malcolm shook his head. "Oliver, it was a mistake to intimidate Somers like that."

"How so, Malcolm?" Oliver asked calmly.

"Because his emotions are likely to get the better of him and there's

no telling what he may do."

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion, Moira was questioning Diggle. 'I hired you to protect my sons.' She paced past him to the window, then turned to regard him. 'Now, I'm not a professional bodyguard, but it seems to me that the first requirement would be managing to stay next to the men you're hired to protect.'

\_'With all due respect, ma'am, I never had a client who didn't want my protection,' Diggle replied levelly.\_

\_Moira stepped forward. 'I hired you. That makes me the client.' She paused for a moment. 'Now, where do you think my sons are going on the chaperone-less excursions?'

\_'Ma'am, I truly do not know.' Diggle shook his head, then a familiar voice interrupted them. \_

\_'And he truly doesn't.' Oliver strolled into the room and Moira gave him a baleful glare.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew and Tommy both snickered at that, and Oliver said in irritation, "I don't know why you think that's funny, Tommy. If I recall, you got that look several times yourself." Tommy's good humor vanished instantly.<p>

"I think Matthew was the only one who never got that look," Thea grumbled.

Amusement colored Malcolm's voice as he said, "You certainly have a way with your children, Moira."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Where's your brother?'<em>

\_'He went upstairs. Said he was tired.'\_

\_Moira shook her head. 'Oliver, if you're leading Matthew astray -'

\_'Mom,' he interrupted, 'do you really think I would deliberately lead my little brother into the same follies I committed, especially after what we went through on the island?'

\_Moira stared searchingly at him, but she could see the truth in his eyes - Oliver would never allow Matthew to follow in his footsteps as a party boy.\_

\_She sighed. 'I know you wouldn't.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Finally you show some sense, Queen," Quentin Lance muttered.<p>

Dusan al Ghul snorted dryly. "It wasn't just Oliver, Detective Lance. When Matthew asked me for permission to court Talia, I made it very clear that if he ever broke my sister's heart, I would kill him for it." Moira blanched and Thea went pale, but Dusan shook his head. "I know this is a shock to you, Mrs. Queen, but I was perfectly serious. Talia's safety and happiness was all that matter to me after we fled Nanda Parbat." Ra's gave his son a glare that Dusan ignored as he continued, "I will not have my sister married to a man who would break his vows to her."

"And I won't," Matthew said in a low voice. "I promised her that." He leaned over and kissed Talia, threading his fingers through her dark hair. Talia leaned in, deepening the kiss, her own fingers trailing down Matthew's back. Cisco gave a groan of disgust, but Ronnie quickly silenced him with a slap to the back of the head. Caitlin smiled at the younger lovers and leaned against Ronnie, who grinned and kissed her on the forehead.

Moira was pleased to see that her younger son would not follow in the footsteps of his father or his older brothers.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver relaxed, but Moira was not about to let him off the hook so easily. 'Then perhaps you'd like to share with me, you know, where it is you run off to,' she said in exasperation.<em>

\_He snickered, prompting her to raise her eyebrows. 'I've been alone for five years.'\_

\_'I know that, Oliver,' she retorted.\_

\_'Mom,' he interrupted, his good humor vanishing. 'Alone.'\_

\_'I see,' she said after a moment.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Eddie laughed, ignoring the withering glare Moira sent him. Laurel, Thea, and even Quentin were inwardly chastising themselves for their blindness.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I promise to introduce her if it ever gets to the exchanging first names stage,' Oliver rushed on.<em>

\_ 'No, I'd rather you promise to take Mr. Diggle with you on your next rendezvous,' Moira snapped, walking up to him. He scoffed as she continued, 'It's not safe. You've already been abducted once. There are two maniacs out there hunting the wealthy.' Diggle watched the tense exchange between mother and son in silence.\_

\_ 'Those maniacs saved my life,' Oliver reminded her, trying to calm her fury.\_

\_ 'This isn't a game.' Her voice wavered. 'I lost you both once. And I am not going through that again.' Oliver's eyes softened as he realized she spoke the truth - she was afraid for both him and Matthew.\_

\_They could make this work. It would mean a change of plans, but it might work.\_

\_'OK. Dig's my guy.'\_

\_'Thank you,' Moira said. She left the room, leaving the two men alone.\_

\_Oliver looked at Diggle. 'Sorry to give you so much grief,' he said, and he almost meant it.\_

\_'I served three tours in Afghanistan, Mr. Queen. You don't even come close to my definition of grief,' Diggle said dryly as he buttoned his jacket. He went to Oliver and looked the younger man straight in the eye. 'But I tell you what - you ditch me one more time, no one will have to fire me.' Oliver gave a slight nod as Diggle left the room.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Hopefully you'll listen this time," Moira said, turning to look at her eldest son with a frown. Oliver only arched an eyebrow, his expression deadpan.<p>

Joe snorted. "Do you honestly expect he'll listen, Mrs. Queen?"

"Oh, I think he will, Detective," Malcolm said. "Oliver isn't a fool. He knows Moira won't be happy if he slips the leash again. Besides, I suspect he's considering bringing Mr. Diggle in on their secret - they would gain a valuable ally and someone to cover for them while they're out." The bodyguard blinked in surprise at Malcolm's statement, then studied the screen with a thoughtful expression.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea, dressed to go out, entered as Diggle departed.<em>

\_'Where you going?' Oliver asked.\_

\_'Uh, somewhere loud and smoky,' Thea snarked. She crossed her arms. 'And don't bother trying to pickpocket my stash this time, because I'm gonna go get drunk instead.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Really, Thea?" Matthew muttered. "You're still doing drugs even after the dealer wound up dead at Tommy's party?"<p>

His words fell like a bombshell. "You knew?" Moira gasped. Tommy gaped at his surrogate brother and the rest of the group were just as surprised.

Matthew took a deep breath and met Thea's stunned gaze. "You already know we were 'rescued' from Lian Yu and taken to Hong Kong after two years. Eventually, Amanda Waller sent us both to Starling on a mission."

"She what?" Tommy practically shouted. "Why didn't you try to contact

us then?"

Oliver shook his head. "We couldn't, Tommy. We wanted to, but we couldn't." Tommy was about to protest, but Oliver continued, "We saw Thea buying drugs from the dealer at our markers." Thea looked at the floor as Moira and Walter both glared at her. "Then you came and mentioned the party, so we disguised ourselves that night and went." Malcolm eyed Oliver patiently. Diggle was mildly surprised, as he had provided security for Merlyn Jr that night and remembered all too well how things had gone down. Never had he imagined that Oliver Queen was responsible for the dealer's death, though. "When I saw the dealer there, I pulled him aside and warned him to stay away from Thea. He recognized me under the hood, so I broke his neck and threw him off the balcony." By now everyone else was staring at Oliver in shock or surprise.

"No one gets away with threatening our family," Matthew said grimly. "No one. That was why Oliver shoved an arrow through Slade's eye."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Thea,' Oliver said as he walked up to her. 'Do you think this is what Dad would want for you?'<em>

\_'Dead people don't want anything. It's one of the benefits of being dead.'\_

\_'Matthew and I were dead,' he reminded her. 'And we wanted a lot. He missed you, Thea, terribly.' For a second her expression softened and he thought she might listen, but that hope was dashed by her next words. \_

\_'You wanted everything except your family,' she said coldly. 'You've been home a week and all you do is avoid Mom, ignore Walter, and judge me. Have you even spent any time with Robbie?' Her last accusation stunned him the most - and made him feel guilt, for it was true. With a final cold look she turned and walked out. 'Don't wait up.' Oliver sighed in frustration.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea avoided looking at anyone, remorse filling her as she thought of what her brothers had just said - how they looked out for her during their mission in Starling, though she hadn't known it - and she was being spiteful and dismissive of them and their feelings.<p>

"Thea -" Caitlin said, but the girl waved a hand without looking at the older woman.

"Please don't, Dr. Snow. Please. I know what you're going to say and you're right, but don't make me feel worse than I already am."

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning Detective Lance met with Martin Somers at his docks office. <em>

\_'Well, I owe you an apology, Mr. Somers,' the cop said as he paced in front of Somers' desk. The magnate himself was sitting behind the

desk, listening politely. Lance spread his hands. 'We come all the way down to your docks, and it turns out you don't need the police after all.'\_

\_ 'Which is exactly what I've been saying,' Somers replied calmly.\_

\_ 'Yeah,' Quentin said, the disbelief clear in his tone. 'So I guess that 911 call we got last night from your stevedore, saying that you were getting attacked by two guys in hoods armed with bows and arrows - I guess, well - was that a practical joke?' He examined a scratch in the surface of Somers' desk before eyeing the man.\_

\_ 'These guys like to fool around,' Somers told him.\_

\_ 'Yeah,' the Detective repeated, and scoffed. 'Well, you know, I'd be very much inclined to believe an honest, upstanding businessman like yourself, except, well, one of my men found this at your docks.' He pulled a green tipped arrow out of the evidence bag and held it up for Somers to see. 'You see, there's these vigilantes running around. They think they're some kind of Robin Hood. They're robbing the rich, trying to teach them a lesson, I guess. I don't know. I don't know. But the point is,' he emphasized, 'these men are killers. And nothing, and no one, is going to stop me from bringing them down.' He fit the arrow tip into the groove on the desk - a perfect match. 'But like you said, clearly nothing happened here last night,' he finished sarcastically.\_

\_ Somers, who had listened with polite curiosity until now, felt his patience fraying. 'Isn't this a conflict of interest, Detective? After all, your daughter is suing me,' he reminded Lance.\_

\_ 'I'm pretty good at keeping my emotions in check,' the cop replied evenly. \_

\_ 'I'm not,' Somers snapped sharply. He stood, his face inches from Quentin's. 'You and your daughter don't want to find out what I'm capable of when I get emotional.' The threat was clear. Lance straightened but did not break eye contact with Somers. They stared at each other for a long moment before Lance turned and left.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Bastard," Quentin growled. "Not only does he have the gall to threaten a police officer, but he threatens my daughter too. He's going down."<p>

"How the hell is he not in jail already?" Eddie demanded. "Threatening a police officer means an automatic jail sentence in Keystone City. No wonder Starling City is declining if men like Somers get away with such actions with impunity."

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Queen Consolidated, Walter and Moira led Oliver and Matthew from the elevator toward Robert Queen's old office. 'As you can see, we've modernized quite a bit,' Walter said. Matthew gave a low whistle. Moira smiled at her younger son's reaction as she walked with Oliver, a hand on his arm.<em>

\_Oliver eyed two young female office workers as they passed. 'Hi.'  
Moirra squeezed his arm with a gentle smile.\_

\_'Are you enjoying yourself?' Oliver smiled in return.\_

\_'Yes, I am.'\_

\_'I remember when your father used to bring you both here when you were boys,' Walter said as they entered the office, with Diggle taking a position by the door. 'You always were so excited.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew looked at his older brother with a grin. "Good times, eh, Ollie?" Oliver snickered.<p>

"Except for the time one of your toy figures fell down an air vent. How you howled over that!"

"It was my favorite toy!" Matthew shot back defensively. By this time Tommy was trying, unsuccessfully, to hide his laughter. The teen turned on him. "Oh, com on, Tommy! You're the one who bought that toy for me!" Tommy just shook his head. Matthew grumbled as he settled back in his chair, ignoring the amused looks he was receiving from the others.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Dad let us drink soda in the office,' Matthew replied, a small smile tugging at his lips.<em>

\_'Ah! So that's why you enjoyed coming,' Moirra teased. He grinned at her before starting a slow circuit of the office, examining everything closely.\_

\_'Queen Consolidated's success of late is a result of its targeted diversification,' Walter said. 'We have been making impressive inroads in cutting-edge fields like bio-tech and clean energy.'\_

\_'That's neat,' Oliver interrupted his stepfather. He called to Walter's secretary outside the office, 'Excuse me?\_\_ Can I get a sparkling water, or something cold, please?' She stood and left.\_

\_'Sweetheart,' Moirra interjected. 'Oliver, Walter and I have something to discuss with you. Come, please sit.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm shook his head. "You're about to make a mistake, Moirra."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Mom, it makes me nervous when you ask me to sit down,' Oliver said warily.<em>

\_After a moment Walter said, 'The company's about to break ground on a new site for the Applied Sciences Division, and we would like to



honor your father by dedicating the building in his name.'\_\_

\_\_'Nice.'\_\_

\_\_'And we'd like to make an announcement at the dedication,' Moira added, 'that you will be taking a leadership position in the company.'\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Nicely done, Mrs. Queen," Caitlin said sarcastically. "You're trying to push him yet again." Moira gave the younger woman an icy glare.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'No,' Oliver said at once. Matthew turned from his contemplation of the city to stare at his brother.<em>

\_\_'Your - your company,' their mother emphasized.\_\_

\_\_'No, I don't want to lead anything,' Oliver said firmly. 'Besides, Walter is doing a very good job here.' Walter looked surprised at that.\_\_

\_\_'You said that you wanted to be a different person,' Moira pressed. 'And you are Robert Queen's son,' she finished softly. Matthew stiffened, knowing just how well the reminder would go over with Oliver.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Seriously, Moira?" Quentin snapped as he turned to her. "Did you really have to go and remind Oliver of that?"<p>

Moira gave him a stony stare. "Do you have a point, Quentin?"

"Yeah," he returned sharply. "You and Merlyn are trying to turn your sons into people they don't want to be, and that's messed up. You may not like it, but you should let them decide their own paths. I accept my daughters for who they are and let them make their own choices." Laurel and Sara both gave their father smiles of gratitude.

Malcolm sneered in derision. "Fine words from the alcoholic." Quentin reddened, but a sharp warning whistle came from Clark Kent. The two men settled for trading barbed glares as the recording continued.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I don't need to be reminded of that,' Oliver said coldly.<em>

\_\_'Well, obviously you do,' Moira snapped, clearly losing patience. Walter put a reassuring hand on her back.\_\_

\_\_'Everyone here understands that this transition is really difficult for you,' he offered, trying to ease the tension.\_\_

\_ 'Thank you, Walter,' Oliver said, the civility he had tried to build crumbling. 'Which part, though? Everyone fantasizing that I got my MBA while I was on the island? Or the fact that my father's CFO now sleeps down the hall from me?' he finished angrily.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ouch," Cisco muttered. "That was far too harsh, Oliver." Felicity looked back at Oliver, on the verge of letting him know just what she thought of his behavior toward Mr. Steele - only to pause as she saw the look of regret on his face.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew came to Oliver's side, taking a firm grip on his shoulder. Oliver glanced at him and Matthew shook his head in a silent warning not to upset their mother further. Oliver bowed his head, ashamed by his outburst.<em>

\_ Their mother looked crestfallen as she went toward the door before stopping to turn back to her elder son. 'You know, five years ago, your irresponsibility was somewhat charming. It is a lot less so now.' She exited the office, followed a second later by Walter.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"A little harsh, Moira, but necessary," Malcolm remarked. Oliver glared at the older man, but before he or Moira could say anything or Caitlin or Stein butt in, Matthew leaned forward.<p>

"If I recall, Oliver wouldn't have been the first to leave the management of a company to others. Uncle Thomas left the management of Wayne Enterprises to Mr. Earle and the board."

"That was different, because your uncle was a doctor," Moira reminded her son.

"That's true," Oliver replied, "but Matt still has a good point. Taking a position at the company would interfere with my nightly activities."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There they are!'  
<em>

\_ Once again the starving reporters were waiting outside, and once again the brothers ignored them entirely. Diggle hustled them into the back of the Bentley and climbed in after Oliver. 'The driver will be here in a minute,' he said, taking a look out the back window.\_

\_ 'Okay.' \_

\_ 'You know,' Diggle said thoughtfully, 'I spent the first twenty-seven years of my life in Starling City, and the next five in Afghanistan. You want to know what I learned?'

\_ 'There's no place like home?' Matthew replied dryly.\_

\_ 'No, just the opposite. Home is a battlefield,' Diggle replied.

'Back home, they're all trying to get you. Get you to open up, be somebody you're not sure you are anymore.' He looked over at them, but they both stared straight ahead. He knew they were listening, though. 'Or I could be wrong. Maybe after five years alone, you're not as messed up in the head as you have every right to be.'\_

\_Neither Matthew or Oliver so much as twitched, but old memories rose to the surface.\_

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\*

\_Matthew roused from a fitful sleep with a start. Something had wakened him. As he shook his head to clear the cobwebs, he realized it was a bird he was hearing. He looked around - then struggled to his feet as he saw the birds above the beached raft. 'Hey!' His shout roused Oliver, who sat up, then bolted to his feet. They both ran toward the raft, where the birds were pecking at their father's body. 'Hey, get away! Hey!' The birds flew off as they drew close to the raft. 'Dad?' Matthew rasped. They both fell to their knees. A life jacket covered Robert Queen's face, concealing the fatal bullet wound. Oliver reached down to grasp his father's hand. A moment later, though, the smell of death and decay became too much. Matthew barely managed to turn his head aside in time to avoid vomiting into the raft. Oliver staggered a short distance away to empty his own stomach.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver and Matthew both closed their eyes as they swallowed back the nausea they felt at both the visuals and the memories. Thea went pale and bolted for the door, but didn't make it before she vomited on the floor. Cisco staggered into the aisle and collapsed to his knees as he retched. Ronnie and Caitlin, though they were just as queasy at the sight of the body, knelt beside Cisco and held him upright so he wouldn't fall face first into his vomit. Hal Jordan snapped, "Pause it!" The screen froze as the three men stood and went to Cisco, Thea, and Felicity, who had also lost the battle with her stomach. The rest of the viewing party, except for Ra's, Nyssa, and perhaps Malcolm, were disturbed by the sight.<p>

The theater door opened and three men entered with trays of water glasses. Hal nodded in thanks and began distributing the water to the guests as the men, without a word of complaint and seeming unfazed by the smell, cleaned up the mess with quick efficiency. Once they were finished, one asked, "Will there be anything further, Mr. Jordan?"

"Bring some trash cans in here," Hal ordered. The men nodded and left, returning a few minutes later with three trash cans, which they set beside the aisle seat on each row the viewing party occupied.

Once several minutes had passed and everyone had a chance to recover, Clark Kent said quietly, "Does everyone feel up to continuing?" Everyone nodded in reply, even Cisco, Felicity, and Thea. A minute later the playback resumed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The birds took advantage of the distraction to settle back on the raft. Clearing his burning throat, Oliver rushed back to beat the birds off again. 'Hey! Hey! Stay away from him!' He reached into the raft, laying his head down momentarily as he tried to catch his breath. After a few minutes, Oliver steeled himself and lifted the body out. He staggered and nearly fell under the deadweight, but managed to shift his burden and regain his balance. With grim determination, he and Matthew headed inland to find a place to bury their father.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra looked away, unable to bear the sight of her husband's body being carried off for burial.<p>

Malcolm closed his eyes as he recalled the day of Rebecca's funeral and how shattered he had been. He knew he wouldn't have had the strength to handle it if he had been forced to bury her himself - not without the training the League had given him. It was truly remarkable that Robert's sons had found the strength to do so.

Barry was ashen. He tried to fathom what it must have been like for the brothers to have done that. He was grateful he had not had to face the prospect of doing that for his mother, because he wasn't certain he could have handled it without breaking down. A hand on his shoulder startled him; he turned to see his father looking at him with a reassuring smile, though it was tinged with melancholy.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_At CNRI Emily Nocenti met with Laurel and Joanna. 'Well, we anticipate that Somers' attorney will try and paint you as blinded by grief or looking to make a buck,' Joanna said as they followed Laurel to her desk. Emily stared at the two lawyers in angry disbelief.\_

\_'This isn't about the money. I just want justice for my father.'\_

—

\_Laurel set her clipboard down. 'Emily,' she said gently, 'there are a lot of people who don't want this trial to proceed. Dangerous people.'\_

\_'My mother died when I was a baby. My father has ben the only family I've ever known and they slit his throat. They are going to have to kill me if they want me to give this up,' Emily replied defiantly.\_

\_'Well, let's hope it doesn't come to that,' Laurel replied, impressed by Emily's courage.\_

\_'And it won't.' Quentin Lance walked in with three patrol officers behind him. Joanna and Emily looked at each other in surprise as Laurel stared incredulously at her father.\_

\_'What's going on?' Laurel demanded.\_

\_'What's going on is that the three of you are getting around the

clock police protection. OK? Get used to their faces, because they're going with you everywhere you go, no arguments.'\_\_

\_Laurel sighed in exasperation. 'I'm a lawyer. I live to argue.'\_\_

\_'I'm your father. I live to keep you safe,' he retorted. Laurel sighed again and crossed her arms as she turned away from him.\_\_

\_'Um, Emily, let's go grab a cup of coffee, okay?' Joanna suggested.\_\_

\_'Yes, why not do that? Thank you.' Quentin turned to the patrol officers. 'Please, go with them.' Two of the cops trailed Emily and Joanna as they left the room, but he held the third cop back. 'Stay there.'\_\_

\_'Protective custody?' Laurel snarked, turning back to her father with a bitter smile. 'I seem to recall you trying that once I discovered boys. It didn't work then, either.' Quentin sighed in impatience.\_\_

\_'This isn't a joke, Laurel,' he said irritably. 'Martin Somers got attacked last night.'\_\_

\_'What?' was all she could say, dumbfounded by the news.\_\_

\_'Yeah.'\_\_

\_'By who?' she asked.\_\_

\_'It doesn't matter.' Laurel lowered her gaze, her mind whirling as she tried to process what she was hearing. 'Point is, you have whipped up a storm with these guys, and until the dust settles you'll be protected, OK? End of discussion.' She raised her eyes as he turned to leave - and found her voice. \_

\_'That might have worked when I was eight. But it's not gonna work anymore,' she challenged.\_\_

\_'End of discussion, Laurel!' he snapped. 'You're insistent on doing your job, that's great. But this is me doing mine, OK? And not just as a father, but as a cop. These, people, they are more dangerous than you are willing to admit. And you've made them angry.' He stormed off.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel glared at her father. "Police protection, really?" she hissed. "Do you think I couldn't take care of myself?"<p>

Quentin ground his teeth. "Why do you have to be so stubborn, Laurel?"

She scoffed. "You're calling me stubborn? I seem to recall Sara was worse than I was." Sara shot her sister a barbed glare.

"Just great, Laurel," she muttered sarcastically, "dragging me into

this." Laurel had the grace to look ashamed as Sara turned to their father. "Dad, I know you want to protect Laurel, but try to see this from her perspective."

Quentin shook his head vehemently. "Sara -"

"Just listen!" she snapped. The Detective rocked back in his chair, a shocked look on his face. "Laurel chose to help the poor in Starling City who are under the thumb of the corrupt. Oliver and Matt are trying to do the same as the Arrows." She poked a finger in his direction. "Because the police department can't - or won't - do its job properly!" Her father opened his mouth - then closed it again, knowing there was nothing he could say in defense of his fellow officers.

A tense silence was broken as Iris remarked, "Laurel, you really should listen to your father." The lawyer glared at the younger woman, but Iris wasn't deterred. "Dad hasn't had any reason to have me in protective custody -"

"And I hope I never have to," Joe muttered.

" - but if he did I would accept it, even if I didn't like it."

"Iris is right," Barry added. "I feel, Laurel, that you don't really consider the dangers of the work you do." Laurel turned her glare on him, but the young man pressed on, "When you tangle with people who are rich and corrupt, like Somers, you should expect that they will come after you. Your father is only doing his duty. Perhaps you should accept his concern instead of fighting him."

"Well said, Barry," Dr. Stein said.

\* \* \*

><p><em>That night a white haired Asian woman in a red dress entered Somers' office, where the magnate sat at his desk.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"You've got to be kidding me," Matthew spat. "How the hell is she out of ARGUS custody?!"<p>

"You've tangled with Chien Na Wei before?" Malcolm asked.

Oliver laughed humorlessly. "When Waller sent us to Starling, it was because of her. Later, after we went back to Hong Kong, we managed to put her behind bars."

"I'd hoped she would stay there," Matthew added tightly. "China White is the Triad's most dangerous assassin." He turned to Laurel. "Laurel, you'd better hope Oliver and I are nearby for the next few days, because if this meeting is what I suspect it's going to be about, the Triad has just signed your death warrant." The older woman paled, as did Thea, Felicity, Caitlin, and Iris. Tommy and Roy both cursed under their breath. Quentin groaned in dismay.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Thank you for coming,' Somers said.<em>

\_'Anything for a friend,' she said amicably.\_

\_'We're not friends,' Somers countered. 'You smuggle drugs, I let you use my port.'\_

\_'For which you're paid a lot of money,' she replied.\_

\_'I don't get paid enough to have arrows shot at me,' he retorted. 'You need to take these guys seriously. They're a bigger threat to your operation than Nocenti ever was.'\_

\_'Except now it's Nocenti's daughter who's the problem,' China White mused. 'Unlike your friends with the hoods, we know where to find her.'\_

\_'Don't be an idiot,' Somers snarled. 'You take out Emily Nocenti, and Laurel Lance will never let this go. She won't stop until she burns you, me, and the entire Triad to the ground.'\_

\_'China White gave him a cold smile. 'Then we kill Miss Lance.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel stared at the screen in shock. Her father dropped his head into his hands, muttering "I told you so" under his breath. Sara glowered at the screen, wishing she could reach through it and kill China White herself.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>In the morning Matthew dressed in his room as he listened to the news. 'The attorney for shipping magnate Martin Somers has confirmed his client has no intention of testifying, maintaining his innocence in the wrongful death of Victor Nocenti. Nocenti's body was found four weeks ago. We'll keep you updated as more information becomes available.' He started to pull his shirt on, but Thea's voice interrupted him.<em>

\_'Wait, how did you get those?' she asked as she entered the room.\_

\_'Matthew sighed in irritation. 'Don't you knock?' he growled.\_

\_'No, wait.' Thea tugged the shirt from his shoulders to expose the scars. 'Mom said that there were scars, but ...' she trailed off as she saw the livid ridges of skin on his chest and shoulders. She swallowed hard, looking at her twin with horror in her eyes. 'Matthew, what happened to you out there?'

\_'I don't want to talk about it,' he finally said as he started to button the shirt, his tone curt.\_

\_'Thea stepped back as if he had struck her, a hurt look on her face. 'We were always so close, Matt. Why won't you open up to me now?' Tears filled her eyes and she bolted for the door. \_

\_'Wait!' Matthew called, regretting his words instantly. She sighed and turned back to him. 'Where are you going?'

\_ 'Why should I tell you?' \_

\_ 'I'm sorry, Thea,' Matthew said slowly. 'I need to get better at talking about what happened to me there. But I'm not ready yet. OK?' \_

\_ Thea stared at him for a moment before she finally said, 'Do you have a second?' \_

\_ 'Yeah,' Matthew replied, curious now. \_

\_ 'Good. I wanna show you something out back.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Walter wrapped an arm around Moira's shoulders as Tommy did the same with Thea. Both brothers stiffened in their chairs. The rest of the group, remembering what Matthew had said earlier, quickly guessed where the twins were going.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>He retrieved his jacket and followed her from the room. Oliver came down the hall with Robbie as the twins reached the second floor landing. Thea led her brothers out of the house and across the rear lawn to a clearing where three headstones stood, the older siblings walking slowly so Robbie could keep up.<em>

\_ 'Sometimes, when I felt - whatever, I'd come here,' Thea said softly. Oliver and Matthew looked down at the markers. \_

\_ The inscription on the first read: \*\*Robert Queen. 1958-2007. A leader, a husband, a father, and a pillar.\*\* \_

\_ Thea knelt and brushed some leaves from the base of their father's marker. 'Mom found out she was pregnant with Robbie about two weeks after the funerals.' Oliver looked down at the sandy haired boy standing in front of him and rested his hands on his brother's shoulders. 'It hit her hard. Between that and losing you - the house got quiet, so I'd come here.' She gestured to the other markers. 'To talk to you.' \_

\_ The second read: \*\*Oliver Queen. 1985-2007. A loving son and brother, whose light was dimmed far too soon.\*\* \_

\_ And the third: \*\*Matthew Queen. 1995-2007. A loving son and brother, who never got the chance to live his life.\*\* \_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew exhaled shakily. Dusan leaned over and rested a hand on his shoulder.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I mean, stupid stuff,' Thea rushed on. 'Like what I was doing that day, what boy I had a crush on.' Her voice wavered. 'And then sometimes, I'd ask you both, beg you, to find your way home to me.' A flicker of pain crossed Matthew's face.<em>



\_ 'Now, here you are. And the truth is, I felt closer to you when you were dead,' she continued, close to breaking down completely. 'Look, I know it was hell where you were. But it was hell here, too.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver sighed wearily. "Thea, you do not know what hell is like." She stared at him as he continued, "You still had Mom, and later Robbie. Your lifestyle. Matt and I had almost nothing. We spent most nights sleeping on the hard ground with no covers, in the rain. Countless times locked up in a cell by Fyers and Slade. We were both tortured without mercy. Even in Hong Kong our lives were not normal. So how dare you say it was hell for you here?" A slight edge crept into his tone. "How dare you think your problems compare to ours?"<p>

Thea stared at him, wide eyed and uncertain, as tears ran down her cheeks. Moira closed her eyes, knowing that Oliver's words, though directed at Thea, were in a way meant for her as well.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You gotta let me in,' she pleaded. 'You gotta let someone in.' She stood there for a moment longer before turning to leave.<em>

\_ 'Thea,' Matthew called. She paused as he moved to join her. 'You're right,' he admitted softly. 'We do need to let someone in. I just -' he paused for a second before continuing, 'I didn't want to burden you with it. Those five years were very hard for me. I would rather spare you the pain of knowing what I went through.' \_

\_ Thea's gaze softened - she knew he meant what he said. 'I know you would, Matt, but don't shut me out completely. Please.' \_

\_ He sighed. 'All right. But you must understand there are some things I may keep from you, with good reason.' Thea only nodded. \_

\_ 'Let's go back inside.' He looked down at Robbie. 'You want to come with us, Robbie?' The four year old bounded to Matthew's side. With a laugh, the older boy swung Robbie onto his back. Thea took her twin's arm and the three headed for the mansion. Oliver stared pensively after his younger siblings before looking back down at his headstone, Thea's words ringing in his ears. \_

\* \* \*

><p>"You were right," Diggle told Thea. "Too many with PTSD keep things bottled up inside. The problem is, it's not easy to find someone to open up to. It took me a long time to do so, and even then there were memories I couldn't bear to talk about."<p>

Matthew sighed and ran a hand across his face. Oliver closed his eyes. Thea's plea had touched him, but who could he open up to? His family and friends wouldn't understand, and he didn't know the others well enough yet.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Laurel's apartment, she was reviewing the notes for the Nocenti case on her laptop while finishing dinner when a knock came at the apartment door. She paused to listen, unsure if she had heard correctly. When the knock came again, she rose and went to the door, looking out through the peephole; she sighed in resignation when she saw who it was. She opened the door and glared at Oliver, who stood in the hallway with a brown paper bag in one hand.<em>

\_ 'Hi. Are you OK? There are two cop cars outside,' he said in puzzlement.\_

\_ 'How am I supposed to stay away from you if you won't stay away from me? What are you doing here, Ollie?' she demanded.\_

\_ 'My sister took -' he paused, then chose his words carefully. 'She pointed out to me that I have been distant since I got back and that it would probably be a good idea if I let somebody in.' \_

\_ 'So, you thought you'd start with the first person you pushed away?' Laurel scoffed.\_

\_ 'I did that to protect you. And then I saw you yesterday, and I realized that I hurt you.' Laurel glowered at him, but stepped aside to let him enter. 'Thank you,' He walked into the sitting room as Laurel closed the apartment door. 'I see you finally got your own place. Looks a little bare, though.' \_

\_ 'I haven't really had time to redecorate,' Laurel snarked as she stalked past him. \_

\_ 'I'm a jerk,' he said quietly. That stopped her short. 'Before the island, I was a jerk, and now I'm just a - I'm a damaged jerk.' Laurel looked at him and folded her arms.\_

\_ 'What's in the bag?' she asked.\_

\_ Oliver hefted the bag. 'I thought about many things on the island, but there was one thing that I thought about every day. I actually dreamed about it, and I promised myself that if I ever got a chance to do it again, I'd do it with you.' He pulled a container of ice cream out of the bag. \_\_ 'Eat ice cream,' he said. Laurel smiled.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ooh," Felicity said. "Mint chocolate chip. My favorite."<p>

Oliver's lips quirked in a smile. "Mine too."

"Great way to relieve stress," Felicity added. Cisco gave a muffled snicker at that.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few minutes later they were sitting before the fire, Laurel on the sofa with a bowl of ice cream, while Oliver sat on the floor with his back against the sofa, eating directly from the container. 'This is as good as I remember,' he remarked. Laurel smiled slightly.<em>

\_After a pause he spoke again. 'My mother wants me to join the company. Yeah. Take my rightful place.'\_

\_'I can't exactly picture you as master of the universe,' Laurel remarked.\_

\_Oliver chose his words carefully. 'You know, after five years, I have plans. I have things that I have to do. I can't do that if I'm - I don't know - attending board meetings and stockholder briefings.' He shook his head.\_

\_'Oliver? You're an adult,' Laurel pointed out. 'You can say no.'\_

\_'Oh, I tried. Didn't take.'\_

\_'Well, then don't tell her. Show her.' She set her bowl down on the table. 'Be the person that you want her to see you as. Trust me, I have plenty of experience with disapproving parents.'\_

\_'I have been on the receiving end of your father's disapproval,' he reminded her.\_

\_'He blames himself more than he blames you,' Laurel revealed. 'He thinks that, you know, maybe if he and Sara were closer, she would have told him about the boat trip. And he could have stopped her from going with you.'\_

\_'I am sorry,' he reiterated.\_

\_'You apologized already.'\_

\_'And it'll never be enough,' he countered. A few seconds later a noise outside caught his attention. 'Did you hear that?' he asked, suddenly tense.\_

\_'What?' She looked in the direction he had, allowing Oliver to palm the knife lying on the table.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin and Laurel both stiffened. "Uh-oh," Iris muttered. "The Triad?"<p>

"No doubt," Oliver snarled.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There's someone on the fire escape,' he said curtly as he stood. Laurel looked at him in alarm. 'Hey, come on!' He grabbed her wrist and pulled her behind him. They ran for the door - and it abruptly shattered inwards as a thug with a machine gun stormed in. Oliver turned and fled for Laurel's bedroom. No sooner had they entered than a second thug crashed through the window, sending broken glass flying. They bolted back out into the sitting room and found themselves trapped. China White stood there, her knives at the ready.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Shit," Roy muttered. "How will you get out of this one, Oliver?" Ra's leaned forward, studying the screen. He knew the Triad assassin would kill both Mr. Queen and Miss Lance if she could, and without his vigilante gear, Mr. Queen might find this a more difficult fight than it would have been.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver tensed, ready to fend off an attack, as Laurel backed against the wall. One of the thugs cocked his weapon to kill  
-<em>

\_and was shot dead from behind. His compatriot quickly followed as Diggle stormed into the room. He was no match for China White, though; their short brawl ended with him on the floor weaponless, China White's knife poised for a killing blow. At that moment Oliver flung the knife he held across the room; it sent China White's knife flying away. She looked at him in surprise before deciding it was better to leave and bolted from the apartment.\_

\_Laurel threw her arms around Oliver, crying in terror. He held her close. Diggle scrambled to his feet and retrieved his gun.\_

\_'Are you hurt?!' he shouted.\_

\_'No,' Oliver called.\_

\_Apparently Diggle didn't hear Oliver's reply, for he shouted again, 'Are you hurt, Mr. Queen?!'\_

\_'No! No.' Oliver shook his head for emphasis.\_

\_'This is why it's a good idea to have a bodyguard!' Diggle called as he went to check the rest of the apartment. Oliver smoothed Laurel's hair back from her face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Lance sighed in relief. "Thank God you were there," he said to Diggle. Moira nodded in agreement.<p>

"Uh, shouldn't you be thanking Oliver, too?" Cisco asked. Lance gave the younger man a harsh glare and Cisco paled, but didn't look away.

Finally the Detective muttered grudgingly, "Thank you, Oliver." Matthew snorted and Oliver raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. Barry and Iris turned away lest Lance see the smiles they couldn't hide.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A short time later EMTs and police officers swarmed through the apartment, gathering evidence and removing the bodies, as Quentin Lance entered. Laurel saw him and ran into his arms.<em>

\_'Daddy! '\_

\_'Oh, thank God,' the detective said in relief. 'Thank God. Are you all right? '\_

\_ 'I'm OK,' she reassured him, then asked, 'Those cops that you put on me -' Her father shook his head.\_

\_ 'I went outside to ask for a light and they were both dead in the squad car,' Diggle offered quietly. Laurel raised a hand to her mouth, her eyes filling with tears, as her father stepped past her.\_

\_ 'Mr. Diggle, thank you,' he said. 'Feel free to run as many red lights in the city as you want.'\_

\_ 'I was just doing my job, sir.'\_

\_ 'No, your job is protecting him,' Lance stressed, jerking his head toward Oliver. He stood nose to nose with the younger man. 'It seems like whenever you're with one of my daughters, people die,' he snarled. 'You stay away from Laurel, or I swear the next time you disappear, it will be permanent.'\_

\_ 'Dad!' Laurel exclaimed.\_

\_ 'No, Laurel,' her father snapped.\_

\_ 'It's OK,' Oliver said quietly. 'I understand.'\_

\_ Lance scoffed and turned away. 'Yeah.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You really need to curb your anger, Dad," Sara said in disapproval.<p>

"You're defending him after he left you to die?" her father shot back. Matthew snarled angrily as Oliver's lips tightened.

Sara winced, but her tone remained calm. "If Oliver hadn't been there Laurel would have been killed."

"Taer-al-Safer is right," Talia interjected. "You should have put your feelings aside, if only for a short time, yet all you saw was the fact that two men - who, I remind you, were targeting Laurel - were killed when Oliver was with her." Quentin looked stung by Talia's harsh words.

\* \* \*

><p><em>On their return to the mansion, Diggle tended his injured hand. Oliver entered the sitting room and tossed him an ice pack. 'Here. I'd say thank you, but I don't think that would cover it.'<em>

\_ 'Well, like I told your cop friend, I was just doing my job,' Diggle replied as he stood. 'Besides, I think it should be you that I'm thanking.'\_

\_ Oliver looked at him in confusion. 'What for?'\_

\_ 'The knife.'\_

\_Oliver bobbed his head. 'The knife. I got lucky.'\_

\_'That was a kitchen knife,' Diggle pointed out. 'It wasn't even weighted properly, yet you threw it with accuracy across a ten foot room.'\_

\_'Exactly. I got lucky,' Oliver deflected.\_

\_'I'm not the kind of man you want to take for a fool, Mr. Queen, you understand me?' Diggle said sternly.\_

\_'Yes.'\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>'And I think I'm just beginning to understand the kind of man you are.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"So it begins," Ra's said quietly. Seeing the confused looks he was getting, the Demon's Head clarified, "Mr. Merlyn's assessment earlier that Oliver and Matthew would consider bringing Mr. Diggle in on their crusade was correct. If one pays attention to their conversation, it is clear that Mr. Queen is testing Mr. Diggle here to see if he can be trusted."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Shouldn't take you very long. I'm shallow,' Oliver replied. 'And very tired, so good night.'<em>

\_'Good night, sir.' Diggle watched him leave, both thankful and frustrated.\_

\_Matthew appeared on the landing in his pajamas as Oliver reached the top of the stairs. 'What happened, Ollie?'\_

\_'Chinese Triad sent assassins after Laurel,' Oliver told him in a low voice as they headed down the hall. 'No doubt Somers hired them. I'm going hunting tonight.'\_

\_'I'm coming with you.'\_

\_'No. I must do this alone. Stay here. Please.' He mentally kicked himself at the look on his brother's face, but his decision was made. 'Matt, I know you want to come, and I want nothing more than to have you with me, but I want to take down Somers alone.'\_

\_Finally Matthew nodded, though he still looked hurt. 'All right. But I'm not staying here. I'll wait for you at the factory.' Oliver nodded in acceptance.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara smirked viciously, knowing Somers would soon regret ordering a hit on her sister.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>A short time later the two slipped out of the mansion and made their way to the Lair.<em>

\_ 'I wanted to give Martin Somers the chance to confess and face a court's justice, but he chose to go after someone I care about instead. He's still going to face justice. It'll just be a different kind.' \_

\_ As Oliver suited up, Matthew sat at the computer and tested their earbuds. 'All comm devices working,' he told Oliver. Oliver nodded in satisfaction as he zipped up his jacket and lowered the hood to hide his face. Moments later he was gone, out into Starling City's streets. With a sigh Matthew settled back to wait.\_

\_ In his office Somers was packing. 'Triad bitch screwed up the hit on Lance,' he told his bodyguard. 'Now the Triad is gonna erase every ounce of evidence of their smuggling operation, including me. Except that's not gonna happen. Tell Wallace to get the boat ready. I'm leaving tonight.' \_

\_ The guard lifted his radio. 'Wallace? Wallace, do you copy?' There was no reply. 'Wallace?' A look of dread crept over Somers' face.\_

\_ 'Wallace isn't here,' a voice crackled over the radio, and Somers eyes widened as he realized it was one of the Hoods. 'But I am.' \_

\_ 'We need to move, now,' Somers gasped. 'Move!'\_ \_

\_ 'Sir, we've got six men out there,' the guard pointed out.\_

\_ 'It's not enough. Move it!'\_ \_

\* \* \*

><p>Ronnie smirked. "Afraid, eh, Somers? Can't take what's coming to you like a man, but trying to hide? Good luck with that." Caitlin laughed at her fiancÃ©'s teardown of the business magnate.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At her apartment Quentin was busy laying down the law, so to speak, to his daughter. 'You're gonna go back into that courtroom tomorrow and you're gonna recuse yourself from this case, all right? Or drop it. Either way, you're done.'<em>

\_ 'If you think I'm gonna abandon Emily Nocenti, then you don't know me all that well,' Laurel shot back.\_

\_ 'You don't know me well, young lady,' her father snarled. 'I will lock you in a cell if that's what it takes.' \_

\_ 'Well, I guess that's what it's gonna take then,' she said defiantly as she stood.\_

\_ Quentin ran a hand across his face. 'Damn it, Laurel!' he shouted, his voice cracking with fear. 'I thought after what happened with Sara, you'd stop being just so reckless!'\_ \_

\_'It's not about being reckless!' she countered, near tears. 'It's just the opposite. I'm trying to make this city safer, just like you.'\_

\_'You're my only daughter, Laurel,' he reminded her. 'You're all I have left to live for.'\_

\_'But what you want from me isn't living. Having cops around, not being able to do my job.' Her voice wavered.\_

\_Lance shook his head. 'Your job is not going after people like the Triad or Somers.'\_

\_'My job is to use the law to fight for what is right,' Laurel shouted. 'Just like you taught me.'\_

\_'Well, that's dirty,' he snapped. 'Using me against me. You can't do that.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel glared at her father as he shifted uncomfortably in his seat, but neither spoke.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>She shrugged. 'Well, maybe I picked that up along the way too.'<em>

\_The ring of the Detective's cell phone broke the silence. Laurel watched as he answered it. 'Lance.' He listened for a moment. 'I'll be right there,' he said, ending the call. He looked at his daughter. 'I gotta go. Something's going on down at the docks.'\_

\_It was pandemonium at the docks as Somers' men tried to bring the Emerald Archer down and failed. Once all the goons had been disposed of, the archer called loudly, 'Somers!' and pursued him into a nondescript building. \_

\_Somers screamed in panic as the vigilante fired, the arrow tearing through his shirt and pinning him to a crate. 'Oh, God! No, no, no!'\_

\_'He can't help you,' Oliver said coldly before nocking another arrow and releasing it, pinning Somers to the crate by his other shoulder. 'I want the truth about Victor Nocenti.'\_

\_'I can't,' Somers gasped. 'The Triad will kill me.'\_

\_'The Triad's not your concern right now!' Oliver snarled, nocking a third arrow and firing, this time between Somers' legs. \_

\* \* \*

><p>All the younger men, save Matthew and Oliver himself, winced at this tactic. On the other hand, all the women were amused, even Moira.<p>

\* \* \*



><p><em>'All right, all right, all right! It wasn't me that killed him. It was the Triad,' Somers said raggedly. <em>

\_'Acting on whose instructions?' he shouted. When Somers did not answer, a fourth arrow flew into the crate just above his head. 'Whose?!' \_

\_'All right, all right! It was mine. It was mine, all right? Nocenti said he was gonna testify against me.' Somers' gaze shifted and Oliver whirled - to find himself face to face with China White.\_

\_'Move away from him,' she said in Mandarin.\_

\_'Make me,' he replied in the same language.\_

\_She exploded into motion, knives flashing. Oliver fended off her blows with all his skill. The fight raged throughout the building as the helpless Somers watched.\_

\_At the factory Matthew listened tensely to the sounds of fighting coming through his ear bud, hoping Oliver would not be hurt or killed.\_

\_Several police cars roared up to the docks as Oliver and China White continued to duel. Abruptly, China White turned and fled as the sound of sirens reached them. A voice shouted, 'This is the police! Put down your weapons or we will open fire. I repeat, lay down your weapons!' \_

\_Oliver, too, ran outside and leaped off a shipping container to the ground - just as Quentin Lance emerged from the shadows with his gun drawn.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Eddie shook his head. "What possessed you to approach him by yourself with just your gun, Lance? That was far too reckless." Quentin pursed his lips and blew out a breath. He knew Thawne was right.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Freeze!' he ordered. Oliver stopped short, half turned away from the cop. Lance advanced on him, holding the gun steady. 'You twitch and you're dead. Bow down, hands up.' Oliver stood stock still. Time seemed to stretch -<em>

\_Then Oliver pulled a fletchette from his thigh holster and threw it sideways into the container behind Lance, disarming the cop in the process. Lance gaped in disbelief, but when he turned back to the Hood the man was gone.\_

\_Lance went over to the container, blinking in surprise when he saw the recording device attached to the small missile. He pressed it lightly - and listened in disbelief to Somers' recorded confession. 'You son of a bitch,' he finally said.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel raised an eyebrow. "Looks like you took care of Somers for us, Oliver." A genuine smile curled Oliver's lips.<p>

"Yeah," Quentin muttered.

"Oh, don't be a spoilsport, Detective Lance," Thea snarked. "Can't you show some gratitude toward my brother for once?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the Foundry it was now daylight. Matthew stood as Oliver entered, clasping his brother's hand in relief before Oliver went to stow his gear.<em>

\_'Laurel was right. I can't be the Oliver my mother wants me to be and still keep the promise I made to my father. I have to be the person I need them to see me as.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea groaned. "Why do I get the feeling this is going to backfire on Laurel?"<p>

"Probably because you know what I'm going to end up doing," Oliver replied.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few hours later a crowd gathered at Queen Consolidated for the groundbreaking of the new Robert Queen Applied Sciences Center. Matthew joined his mother, Thea, and Robbie on the stage, trying to hide the exhaustion he felt.<em>

\_In the crowd, Tommy made his way to Laurel. 'OK, this is a surprise. Did you show up here by mistake?'

\_'By invitation,' she clarified. 'Oliver invited me last night.'

\_'Last night?' Tommy laughed incredulously.

\_'Is that surprise or jealousy I'm hearing?'

\_'Look, I just don't want him to find out anything, OK? Oliver has been through a lot.'

\_'Tommy, we've all been through a lot,' she rebutted.

\* \* \*

><p>Scoffs of disbelief could be heard from Oliver, Matthew, and Dusan as Sara pinned her older sister with a hard stare. Laurel flushed and looked away, suddenly recalling what Oliver had said to Thea earlier - that she did not know what hell was like - and realized that she was in no position to say what she had said, when her little sister, Matthew, and Oliver had been through far more.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Walter began to speak from the podium and the crowd quieted. 'Good afternoon, and thank you all for coming. Welcome to the future site of the Robert Queen Memorial Applied Sciences Center.' There was polite applause. ' Now, this is a building that will stand as a monument to the man whose company and vision are his greatest legacies.'<em>

\_Oliver's voice came from behind the crowd, startling them all. Everyone turned to look. 'Whoa, whoa!' He grabbed a glass of champagne from a tray and quickly downed it before handing it back. 'What about me? Right?' he slurred. 'I'm a legacy. Hey! Thanks for warming them up, Walt.' \_\_Thea stared and Matthew gritted his teeth as Oliver mounted the stage and took the shovel from Walter. 'All right. Ow!' Some in the crowd began to whisper.\_\_

\_Oliver flashed a smile for the cameras. 'Some of you may not know me,' he started much too loudly. 'My name is Oliver Queen.' Silence fell. Moira and Thea both looked disconcerted. Oliver rushed on, 'Watch some television, read a newspaper, I'm kind of famous right now. Mostly, though, I'm famous because I'm Robert Queen's son.' Moira's face fell. 'Uh, but as Walter, who's my new dad - Huh? Who is - sorry. As Walter was saying, I'm not much of a legacy, per se.'\_\_

\_'Oliver, you don't have to do this,' Walter said quietly, trying to prevent his stepson from making a bigger fool of himself. \_

\_Oliver waved him off. 'No, sit. Sit! Gosh.' Walter reluctantly sat beside Moira, and Oliver turned back to the microphone. 'See, I was supposed to come here today, and I'm supposed to take my rightful place at the company. The prodigal son returns home and becomes the heir apparent.' He glanced at Matthew. 'But I'm not my father,' Oliver said quietly. 'I'm not the man he was,' he continued, turning to look at his mother. Moira looked dismayed and ashamed, as did Thea. 'I'm not half the man he was. I never will be. So please, stop asking me to be. If you want a Queen running Queen Consolidated, look to Matthew. He's the one our father wanted to take over as CEO.' He thrust the shovel into the mound of dirt beside the podium and walked past his stunned family. Matthew stood and took hold of Oliver's arm; Oliver simply looked at him before walking off the stage and through the silent crowd, pausing briefly to speak to Diggle, who followed him.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"So the truth finally comes out," Caitlin said quietly. She looked at Oliver. "I say it's a good thing that you made it clear how you felt, even if it was in public."<p>

Oliver shook his head. "I loved my father, but I was getting tired of being seen only as his son. Everyone was expecting me to step into his shoes, and the thought frightened me. I didn't feel I could handle it and was worried that I would let everyone down. That's why I rebelled so much before the **\*\*Gambit\*\***."

His words were like a knife in Mora's heart. She turned away to hide her feelings, wondering why Oliver had never opened up to her or Robert about the pressure he had felt he was under.

Walter was not as shocked as his wife, for he had seen years before

that Oliver did not want to follow in Robert's footsteps, and had tried to warn his CEO and friend about it. Robert had thanked him, but Walter had known that he would not listen to it.

The others were surprised (Cisco, Barry, Iris), shocked (Joe) or sympathetic (Eddie).

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later that afternoon at CNRI, Laurel, Emily, and Joanna watched the news report of Martin Somers' arrest. 'Martin Somers, the CEO of Starling Port, was arrested last night for the murder of Victor Nocenti. He is also being accused of accepting cash, including over ten million dollars in bribes.' <em>

\_Joanna turned the TV off. 'Well, we can pursue the civil suit if you want, but the DA now has no choice, with Mr. Somers' confession, to prosecute him. He's going to jail, Emily. For the rest of his life.'\_

\_Emily smiled at them both. 'Thank you so much for fighting for us.'\_

\_'Well, thank you for being brave enough to let me,' Laurel replied as she returned Emily's smile.\_

\_Emily walked out just as Quentin Lance entered. 'Hey.'\_

\_'I thought I didn't need police protection anymore,' Laurel muttered in exasperation.\_

\_'I thought I didn't need a reason to see my own daughter,' he countered.\_

\_'You don't,' she replied as she sat at her desk. He joined her. 'You look tired.'\_

\_'Yeah, I was filling out reports on the shootout at the port last night and getting grilled about how I let that archer get away,' he replied.\_

\_'I have to admit, I'm kind of glad he did,' Laurel said quietly. 'He brought down Martin Somers.'\_

\_Her father scoffed. 'He hurt a bunch of people doing it, OK? He is no hero. He is an anarchist.'\_

\_'Yeah, well, whoever he is, it seems like he's trying to help.'\_

\_'The city doesn't need that kind of help, OK? It's like I always told you, you don't need to go outside the law to find justice.' She pressed her lips together. 'Now I believe that. All right? And I promise you, when I catch this guy, he's gonna believe it too.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara snorted in disdain at her father's assurance; he scowled at her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>In his bedroom, Oliver opened the notebook and crossed Martin Somers' name off the List.<em>

**\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\***

\_Oliver struggled to carry his father's body across the rocky and desolate terrain of Lian Yu. When he stopped to catch his breath and lowered his burden to the ground, he discovered the book in his father's pocket. He pulled it out and held it up so Matthew could see it. Together they flipped through it, but all the pages appeared to be blank. On the inside cover, though, was a strange symbol.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm's eyes narrowed. He had wondered how the brothers had the List, and now he had his answer.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>**\*\***

\_Elsewhere in Starling City, a limo pulled up beside a waiting sedan on an abandoned stretch of road. Moira got out of the sedan and entered the limo, looking across to the man sitting in shadow. 'Well, you saw for yourself,' she said as she removed her sunglasses. 'My sons know nothing. Robert didn't tell them anything that could hurt us. And they have no idea the yacht was sabotaged.'\_

\_In response the man held up a book with a familiar symbol on it.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait a minute ..." Tommy muttered, his face turning dark with anger. "That's Dad's limo, I'm pretty sure." He turned to his father, his eyes blazing, as the Central party and most of the Starling group gaped at him. "You knew the <strong>Gambit <strong>was sabotaged, didn't you, Dad?" he hissed. Moira groaned as Malcolm turned to look at his son, his eyes glittering dangerously. Shock flickered across Matthew and Oliver's faces for a second, then their expressions turned hard as granite as they stood, glaring at Malcolm. Sara, too, was on her feet, shaking off Nyssa's calming hand. Thea stared back and forth between her mother and Malcolm, fear and loathing written across her face. All the others were shocked or - in the case of Talia, Dusan, and even Nyssa - disgusted, except for Ra's, who watched his former acolyte impassively.

"Did you have the **\*\*Gambit\*\*** sabotaged, Malcolm?" Matthew demanded, and everyone heard the voice of the Scarlet Archer.

Not fazed in the slightest by the teen's tone, Malcolm looked him straight in the eye and said simply, "Yes."

For a moment there was nothing but silence, then Matthew whispered so softly they could barely hear him, "You bastard." Without warning he leaped over the empty chairs in front of him, directly toward Malcolm.

Malcolm spun aside; Matthew landed on the main floor on his feet and

immediately whirled around, driving his foot toward Malcolm's knee. The businessman grabbed the teen's leg and twisted hard. Matthew grunted as his leg suddenly went numb and fell to his knees. Malcolm whipped his hands toward Matthew's neck, but the boy deflected the blow. By this time Oliver was on the main floor as well; he lashed out with a kick at Malcolm's ribs, but the older man sidestepped with ease. Matthew regained his feet and lunged at Malcolm. Malcolm sidestepped again, landed a solid punch on Matthew's knee, then planted a foot in his back. The breath left Matthew's lungs in a rush as he crashed into a chair. The commotion had wakened Robbie; the four year old was crying as Thea screamed for Malcolm to stop. Dusan sprinted down the steps, nearly knocking Barry and Cisco, who were already out in the aisle - perhaps to join the fray - over in his haste. Joe, Quentin, and Eddie all rose, the last about to rush in - then a piercing sent everyone to their knees with ears ringing as a set of ropes materialized out of nowhere to bind Malcolm and the brothers.

"That is enough!" Clark Kent roared. Hal Jordan stood beside the Kryptonian with his hand raised; the ropes binding the three men had materialized from the ring he wore on one finger. Arthur Curry had a hand pressed to his ear and spoke in a low voice, requesting backup to restrain the guests if needed.

Quentin Lance glared at the superheroes. "You shouldn't have interfered," he spat. "Merlyn deserves to be punished for what he did to my daughter!"

"Violence is not the answer," Kent retorted harshly. "Mr. Merlyn did arrange to have Robert Queen murdered, yes, but Oliver and Sara made their own choices when they chose to sail on the *Gambit*. It was unfortunate that they were caught in the crossfire, but you cannot pin it all on Malcolm, Detective Lance." Quentin did not say anything further, but the venomous stare he gave Malcolm made his feelings on the matter perfectly clear.

Tommy stared at his father with a look of pure hatred. "How could you, Dad?" he said so quietly that a chill swept through the room. "Why?"

Malcolm did not reply to his son's question, instead looking at Matthew as the seventeen year old rose to his feet, holding a hand to his ribs. "Matthew," he said, "No matter what you must think of me right now, believe this: had I known you were going to accompany Robert to China, I would have convinced him to make you remain in Starling - for Thea's sake and your mother's." The boy only shook his head as he took a pained breath, disbelief clear in his eyes.

Hal Jordan said sternly, "I will loose these ropes, but no one is to go after Mr. Merlyn again. If I have to, I will call someone else in here to keep an eye on all of you, and he won't be so forgiving." With that the man lowered his hand; the light green glow emanating from his ring faded and the ropes fell away from the three to lie on the floor. Clark Kent moved to Matthew's side and touched the boy's arm. With a weary look of reluctance, Matthew went back to his seat. Talia leaned over and wrapped her arms around him even though the harsh look she gave Malcolm did not waver. Slowly, the others retook their seats as well. Robbie was still sniffing as Walter held him; Arthur Curry gently laid a hand on the boy's head and Robbie's eyelids fluttered shut.

The playback resumed minutes later.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver arrived at the clearing to stand before his father's marker. He had the notebook in his hands. Kneeling before the marker, he bowed his head briefly before looking at the inscription carved into the stone - at his father's name. 'All that time on the island, plotting my return, I didn't realize how hard it would be. To reconnect with Mom, Thea, Laurel.' His voice cracked and he stopped, unable for a moment to go on. 'OK, I didn't - I didn't know how painful it would be to keep my secrets,' he finally whispered. 'You asked us to save the city. To right your wrongs. We will. I swear,' he vowed. 'But to do that, I can't be the Oliver that everyone wants me to be, which means that sometimes to honor your wishes -' he swallowed hard ' - I need to dishonor your memory. I'm sorry.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver grimaced inwardly. He was getting tired of these personal moments being shown to the others. He twisted in his seat and glared at the three men above him, but none of them were fazed by his ire.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>He stayed where he was for a second longer before standing and turning to the grave diggers waiting a short distance away. 'Take them down,' he ordered, jabbing a finger toward his and Matthew's markers. The men nodded and started to work.<em>

\_Oliver walked to the car where Diggle waited. 'Will you be going out tonight, sir?'\_

\_Oliver looked levelly at him. 'Definitely.' He climbed into the car and Diggle closed the door.\_

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\*

\_Together Oliver and Matthew set the final stones in place over their father's body. As they straightened, a sudden whoosh reached their ears. Matthew cried out and fell atop the grave, an arrow in his right leg just above the knee. Blood quickly stained his pants leg.\_

\_Oliver started to turn and only had time to glimpse a hooded figure with a bow and arrow before the mysterious stranger fired again, sending an arrow into Oliver's right shoulder. He screamed as the pain hit him and fell beside Matthew, who was already unconscious. Seconds later, so was Oliver.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco and Barry gaped at the screen as it faded to black. Thea gasped and Tommy gripped her hand. Moira moaned, "Dear God."<p>

Walter shook his head in revulsion at the thought of his stepsons injured, but said gently, " It's all right, Moira." Henry leaned

forward and laid a reassuring hand on the woman's shoulder, hoping it would bring her some comfort. He couldn't imagine Barry being shot like that, and the sight of Oliver collapsing had disturbed him.

Roy winced. He had been stabbed with a sharp knife before so he knew something of the pain the brothers would have felt, though an arrow wound was very different from a knife wound.

Five minutes in silence passed before the next recording began.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) This episode implies that **Laurel** got her apartment before the **Gambit** sank, but **The Undertaking** flashbacks reveal that she wanted to move into an apartment with **Oliver** because she was tired of living with her parents. My head canon is that **Laurel** had signed the lease and **Oliver** had seen the apartment, but **Laurel** didn't actually move in until after the yacht went down.

—

#### 4. Episode III: Lone Gunmen

\_In the Lair Oliver and Matthew were working out with cement blocks and chains. It was night in Starling City.\_

\_ 'My name is Oliver Queen.' \_

\_ 'My name is Matthew Queen.' \_

\_ 'To our family, we are the brothers and sons who just returned home after being lost at sea five years ago. They don't know we came back with a mission, to bring justice to our city, and they never can. The men and women we've targeted are dangerous, corrupt: a virulent cancer.' Abruptly Oliver pulled the chain he was holding taut, then let go. The cement blocks crashed to the floor and shattered on impact.\_

\_ Later, once back in their shirts, Matthew browsed through news articles on the computer as Oliver flipped through their father's notebook.\_

\_ 'Oliver, look.' Oliver craned his head to see the article Matthew had pulled up: **Holder Group Not Liable For Negligence In Blaze**\_

\_ 'Cancers like James Holder, whose corporation put defective smoke detectors in low income housing in the Glades. There have been many fires and too many funerals.' Oliver opened the book to the page where Holder's name was written. After a moment he went to the case that held his bow. 'But cancers can be fought and conquered. All it takes is a surgeon and the right instrument.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"I remember that," Quentin said. "Never could understand how the smoke detectors didn't do their jobs."<p>



Laurel nodded soberly; she too remembered the uproar that had resulted after several homes burned with the families still inside.

Roy's face was tight with anger. "Two of my father's friends, and their families, burned to death because of the defective detectors. I hoped that someone in the system would see the truth and give James Holder the justice he deserved. Thirty years - and the judge let him walk. The justice system spat in our faces. Holder is nothing but a scumbag."

"I'm sorry, Roy," Matthew said quietly. Roy looked back at him and nodded sharply.

"Put Holder behind bars where he belongs and I'll be happy."

"We'll see to it," Oliver promised. The Detectives glanced at him, but said nothing.

"This is a prime example of the way justice is flouted," Talia said quietly. "The crimes of Adam Hunt and Martin Somers were reprehensible, yes, but James Holder is worse than they are. He cares nothing for the lives of other people. Hunt stole money. Somers was affiliated with the Triad, but even so, his crimes in the previous recording were confined to the death of a single man. James Holder is responsible for the deaths of dozens, including children."

\* \* \*

><p><em>At his penthouse Holder, in a bathrobe, walked around the rooftop pool as he carried on a phone conversation. 'Heh. Other than the bill I got handed this morning by my legal team, I'm feeling pretty good. Plus, now that this lawsuit's been settled, we can focus our attention on Unidac Industries.' He listened for a moment. 'OK. I'll see you in the office first thing.' He ended the call and threw the phone down on a pool bench. <em>

\_As Holder lifted the wine bottle he held to his lips, an arrow flew out of the darkness to shatter it. He cried out and looked to the side to see the Hoods standing there. \_

\_'I have armed security inside,' he said defiantly. 'All I have to do is call out.' \_

\_'Go ahead,' the Emerald Archer replied as he tossed two guns to the deck. 'They can't hear you.' \_

\_Holder looked frightened now. 'What the hell do you want?' \_

\_'How many people died in those fires? How many?' the Scarlet Archer demanded. \_

\_None of them knew death was about to come their way. Behind them a sniper trained his rifle sight on James Holder. \_

\_'The courts say you don't owe your victims anything. We disagree. James Holder, you -' \_

\_Suddenly a gunshot shattered the night air. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Iris, Barry, Cisco, Caitlin, Laurel, Felicity, Thea and Tommy all jumped. Even the Detectives looked startled, for the gunshot had come out of nowhere and so unexpectedly.<p>

"Wow," Cisco muttered. "Looks like someone else was after James Holder."

"The question is: who?" Ronnie wondered. "And why?"

"I don't know, but when I find out who it was, I'll break his neck," Oliver growled. "James Holder was ours to deal with."

"It looks like this recording is going to be different from the previous ones," Dr. Stein remarked. "Instead of going after someone on the list, you'll be going after his killer instead."

\* \* \*

><p><em>A bloodstain appeared on the front of Holder's robe, widening rapidly. He fell face first into the pool, dead, as the archers whirled and fired in the direction the shot had come from. The sniper fired twice more, sending them both diving for cover, then all was silent. Oliver looked over at the pool where Holder's body floated, a grim expression on his face.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good riddance," Roy muttered.<p>

"Take it down a notch, Harper," Quentin warned.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Then he felt the pain in his arm and looked down to see that a bullet had struck him just below the shoulder. 'Matt,' he hissed.<em>

\_His brother took one look and whispered, 'Come on. We have to get you back to the factory.' They rose and hurried away, Oliver leaning on Matthew's shoulder as the younger man wrapped an arm around his waist to steady him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea gasped, but Oliver said reassuringly, "It's not that bad, Speedy. I've had worse." He went to sit beside her and pulled her close, slipping his arm around her shoulders. She leaned against his chest.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the Lair Matthew removed the bullet, dropping it into a surgical dish, and stitched the wound shut. Oliver sat quietly as his brother worked.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Caitlin turned to Matthew and arched an eyebrow. "That was a good

job, Matthew."<p>

"It would have been better if you had gone to the hospital," Henry added, "but of course you couldn't do that without raising questions. Still, as long as the environment wasn't contaminated, there shouldn't be any complications."

Oliver barely managed to suppress a wince as he recalled having to dig the bullet out of his side on the\*\* Amazo\*\*; he seriously doubted the freighter's holding cells would have fit Dr. Snow or Dr. Allen's definition of a sterile environment.

Felicity shuddered. "Ugh, I hate needles."

Roy sniggered, but a voice from the top row interjected, "Don't be too quick to laugh at Miss Smoak, Mr. Harper. You don't like needles either." Roy's mirth immediately vanished and he shot a barbed glare at Arthur Curry, who only smirked.

Thea laughed at seeing the street boy put in his place. Roy turned his glare on her; he had kept his opinion on the rich girl's attitude to himself so far, but this was too much. Thea returned his glare with an equal one of her own.

Cisco began to laugh. "Oh, this is funny," he gasped. Caitlin turned away to hide her smile. Malcolm was amused by the silent staredown between the two; he had always known Thea had inherited her mother's steel. Moira shook her head at her daughter's attitude, though she had to admit it was amusing.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Done,' Matthew announced a few minutes later.<em>

\_Oliver nodded. 'Thank you, Matt,' he said quietly as he stood and pulled on his shirt before going to the computer. 'It's no surprise a man as corrupt as James Holder has more than one enemy.' He opened the notebook and crossed out Holder's name. Suddenly, he stiffened in his chair and winced. Something was wrong. He stood, only to stagger as he tried to take a step, and barely caught himself in time. Realizing, he rifled through the bloodstained gauze Matthew had deposited in the dish with the bullet. 'Matt,' he called. The teen turned around just as Oliver crashed to the floor. 'The bullet,' he rasped. 'Poison!'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver grimaced in frustration. Clearly this was one man he and Matthew would have to track down quickly before James Holder ended u dead. No wonder Holder had died so quickly, even with a bullet to the heart.<p>

"Poison?" Tommy gasped. Moira turned white. Caitlin and Henry both leaned forward intently.

Ra's' eyes narrowed. Poisoned bullets ... he knew of only one man who used such weapons, the man who had cost the League the life of an assassin four years earlier.

"Diggle, what is it?" Iris asked. Everyone's gazes whipped to the

bodyguard, who was staring at the screen with his jaw clenched.

He was silent for so long that they thought he wouldn't answer, but finally he said, "A few years ago my brother Andy was killed by a sniper who uses poisoned bullets. He targeted the client Andy was protecting, but Andy got in the way." Stricken looks from nearly everyone in the Central and Starling parties greeted that statement, while the brothers, Malcolm, Sara, Nyssa, Talia, Dusan, and even Ra's were surprised.

"Shit, Diggle. I'm sorry," Eddie said after a minute. "A man who would target someone like this ... he's a scumbag. Did your brother have any other family?"

"Yeah, his wife and son. AJ's only a kid."

"I promise, Mr. Diggle, once we return, I'll help you track down this guy," Quentin Lance said seriously. He glanced at Oliver. "I suspect Queen already has a plan in mind -" Oliver glared at him " - but I will help any way I can."

"As will I," Eddie offered.

"And I," Joe added. "You are a brother officer, Mr. Diggle, even though you were in Special Forces and not a cop."

"Thank you all," Diggle said with a small smile. "I appreciate it."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew reacted immediately, rushing to Oliver's crate and hurriedly unlatching it. He dug through until he found what he was looking for - a pouch of herbs. He sprinted back to Oliver's side with the pouch and a water bottle. Pulling a pinch of herbs from the pouch, he handed them to Oliver, who chewed them before taking the water bottle and drinking deeply. Then he collapsed on his back, unconscious.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"What were those?" Thea asked in confusion as she looked at her brothers.<p>

"We found those herbs on Lian Yu," Matthew said. "They have amazing regenerative effects."

"Really?" Caitlin said, a skeptical look in her eyes. "I wouldn't be so quick to put all my faith in a strange plant."

Matthew nodded. "I understand your skepticism, Dr. Snow, but the herbs did help Oliver and me recover from serious injuries during our days on Lian Yu."

"Interesting," Dr. Stein murmured.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea<em>\*\*\*

\_Oliver woke to see sunlight filtering from above. He groaned in pain as he tried to sit up, then remembered the arrow in his shoulder. Beside him Matthew stirred and let out a tortured moan.\_

\_At that moment the hooded archer entered the cave where the brothers lay. 'Who are you?' Oliver gasped. The stranger pushed his hood back to show his face. 'Why did you shoot us?'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew smiled wistfully. Despite everything that had happened after with Fyers, he would always be grateful to Yao Fei for teaching them to survive.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The stranger knelt beside them. 'To protect you,' he said in Mandarin. Matthew was fully awake now, staring at him in fear and suspicion. The man picked up a bowl and extended his hand; in his palm was a pinch of strange looking herbs. Oliver shook his head, but the archer persisted. 'Drink,' he said in Mandarin.<em>

\_Oliver finally gave in. 'Him first,' he said, gesturing to Matthew. The stranger's face softened as he looked at the twelve year old. He set the bowl down and slid his arm around the boy's shoulders to support him. Warily, Matthew took a handful of the offered herbs and chewed them. The man handed him the bowl and Matthew drank, trying not to gag. Abruptly the stranger reached down and pulled the arrow out through Matthew's leg. The boy screamed in pain.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra and Thea blanched on hearing Matthew's agonized scream. "I think I'm going to be sick," Felicity muttered.<p>

"Why did he push the arrow through?" Caitlin asked, looking at Matthew. "He could have just pulled it back out."

Oliver shook his head. "If he had tried, Dr. Snow, there was the risk the arrowhead would have broken off and lodged in Matthew's leg. Better to pull the shaft through his leg instead."

\* \* \*

><p><em>After laying Matthew down gently on the cave floor, the stranger turned to Oliver. Oliver accepted a handful of the herbs, chewed them, and washed them down with water before the stranger pulled the arrow out of his shoulder.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Henry turned and frowned at Oliver. "Leaving aside the fact that you were both badly injured, why did you put your trust in a complete stranger - one who shot you, no less - when you didn't know what his intentions were?"<p>

"You're right, Dr. Allen," Oliver replied calmly. "We did put our trust in Yao Fei, but we had no choice but to trust him. Without him, we would have been captured by the mercenaries who were on the island

at the time." Henry stared at the younger man in surprise, as did most of the others, but Oliver offered nothing more.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>\*\*

\_Sunlight on his face woke Oliver. He opened his eyes and saw Matthew dozing on the floor beside him. His brother immediately roused. 'Ollie, we have to get back. Oliver looked at the computer clock and growled in frustration; it was ten minutes after seven. He stood, wincing as pain flared in his arm, and grabbed his jacket. Matthew was already halfway up the stairs.\_

\_Oliver was still shaking his arm as they entered the mansion a little later. To their surprise, two cops were talking with their mother and Walter in the sitting room while a sullen Thea slumped on the couch. Diggle, who was standing in the doorway, turned to them.\_

\_'What happened? Thea OK?' Matthew asked in concern.\_

\_'The cops brought her home,' he told them quietly. 'Her and some of her friends broke into a store, tried on some dresses last night. Lit up the breathalyzer like a Christmas tree.' Matthew groaned in frustration and Oliver winced.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Nice going, Thea," Tommy said sarcastically.<p>

"For once, I agree with Merlyn," Roy added. "I drink, but I know when to stop. That's something you clearly need to learn, Miss Queen." Thea shot him a stony glare. Quentin Lance shook his head - he disapproved of the teen's drinking, but knew if he said anything it would be viewed as a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Oliver turned to his little sister with a frown. "Thea, I get that you're doing all this because it's the way you remember me before the **Gambit**, but that is not a healthy thing to do. If you keep this up, it's going to land you in jail or worse." Thea looked at her older brother, then away, biting her lip.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'So how was your evening, sir?' Diggle asked, deadpan.<em>

\_'You mean after we said we had to go to the bathroom at dinner and never came back?' Oliver replied. Matthew tried unsuccessfully to hide a smile.\_

\_'I guess from now on I'll be watching you pee.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco muttered something under his breath. Diggle turned to him with a raised eyebrow. The younger man flushed and looked away. <em>Man, private security people are crazy, <em>he thought. It was

one thing to endure that humiliation every few months for medical testing, but otherwise?

Ronnie eyed Diggle uneasily. "You're joking, right? Please tell me you're joking."

"I wouldn't want to, unless Mr. Queen was really asking for it," the bodyguard replied calmly, looking at said man, who raised his eyebrows.

\_Man, I'm glad I'm not Queen here, \_Ronnie thought.

\* \* \*

><p><em>They locked eyes for a moment before Walter's voice interrupted them.<em>

\_'Thank you, officers. My wife and I appreciate it. I'll see you out.' The brothers entered the room as the men left. Matthew sat down beside his twin, trying not to cringe at the smell of alcohol on her breath.\_

\_Moira turned to face her daughter. 'Last time it was public intoxication,' she said sternly. 'This time breaking and entering. My, how we are moving up in the criminal world.'\_

\_Thea looked amused as she stood and folded her arms. 'You know, when you pay off the store owner, you should check out the merchandise. They got some pretty killer outfits.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew snorted disdainfully and shot Thea a hard look. She turned crimson and directed her gaze to the back of the chair in front of her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira sighed in exasperation. 'Thea, go get ready for school.'<em>

\_'Uh, you know, I was thinking of taking a sick day.' Matthew raised an eyebrow in disbelief.\_

\_Moira gave in. 'Fine, then get some sleep.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Caitlin gave Moira an incredulous stare. "Really, Mrs. Queen? Letting your daughter skip school when her grades probably aren't that good?"<p>

Moira glared at Caitlin and snapped, "I don't see that it's any of your business."

The younger woman shook her head. "Mrs. Queen, I've seen several well off teenagers in Central City get repeatedly arrested or end up in the hospital because they broke the law. In every case, the reason they were acting out is because their home lives were a mess. Not only do they land in trouble with the law, but their academics suffer

as well. Every single one of those teens are bright and would have a great future ahead of them if they applied themselves in school, but instead they barely attend classes and don't do their homework, or they rush through it just to get it done because it's 'boring.' They would rather smoke, drink, and speed than think about their future." Here Caitlin looked at Thea. "A word of advice, Miss Queen. Stop acting out and start acting like an adult. You will be one soon enough, and it's time you grow up."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea, still looking amused, walked past her brothers and out of the room, pausing long enough to tell Oliver, 'You look like crap.'<em>

\_ 'You're letting her play hooky?' Oliver demanded once Thea was gone.\_

\_ 'When your sister gets like this, it's best to give her space,' Moira rebutted.\_

\_ 'She's testing you,' Oliver pointed out.\_

\_ 'Yes. Who'd she learn that from?' Moira shot back.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ooh, burn," Felicity muttered. Oliver and Thea both glared at the woman, but she only shrugged.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Mom, when I was her age, you and Dad let me get away with murder. Looking back, I could have used less space and more parenting.' He left, leaving a surprised and contemplative Moira behind.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Never thought I'd hear you say something like that, Queen," Quentin muttered.<p>

"Nor I," Malcolm added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira looked at her younger son. 'I suppose I should be grateful you haven't picked up Thea's bad habits,' she said dryly, 'though considering you're running around with Oliver most nights, I have to wonder.'<em>

\_ Matthew chuckled as he rose. 'No danger of that, Mom. I saw enough of the trouble Oliver got in before -' he paused, swallowing hard, then continued. 'Anyway, it was enough to convince me not to go down that path.'\_

\_ Moira knew what her son had been about to say and appreciated that he had tried to spare her feelings. 'Come here,' she said gently. He threw his arms around her.\_



\_ 'I miss him.' It was barely a whisper, but Moira heard it.\_

\_ 'So do I.' she felt him shudder and held him closer, stroking his cheek as she had done when he was a child. His eyes half closed.\_

\_ 'You're trying to put me to sleep,' he accused lightly, but did not pull away.\_

\_ 'And you need it. I can tell you're tired. Why don't you go upstairs?' He nodded and stepped back, then left the sitting room.\_

\_ When Moira entered his bedroom ten minutes later, he was sprawled on top of the bedcovers, fast asleep. Carefully, so as not to wake him, she sat down on the edge of the bed and smoothed a strand of hair back from his face. He twitched slightly, a pained whimper escaping his lips. Evidently he was in the grip of a nightmare. 'Shh,' she whispered. He twitched again before settling with a restless sigh. She reached for the blanket at the foot of the bed and unfolded it, laying it across his back and shoulders.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"That was one thing I really missed during the last few years," Matthew said wistfully. Moira smiled sadly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Holder's penthouse Lance and Hilton were deep in conversation as other officers and coroners swarmed around. 'It doesn't make any sense,' Lance said.<em>

\_ 'Holder fits the profile,' Hilton said. 'Wealthy dirtbag. Red meat for the Hoods. And we recovered at least one arrow.'\_

\_ 'Yeah, only this time the cause of death is a double tap through the heart and our perps don't use firearms,' Lance mused.\_

\_ 'Maybe they've finally figured out there's easier ways to kill people than with bows and arrows. It's like you said, these guys are a whack job,' Hilton said.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew growled at the implication of Hilton's statement. Moira's lips thinned in displeasure. Malcolm arched an eyebrow at Lance - if the man thought the Emerald and Scarlet Archers were nutjobs, what would he think of Malcolm's Dark Archer? Briefly Malcolm amused himself with imagining a confrontation between his alter ego and the Detective.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Lance looked thoughtful as he directed a look at the pool.<em>

\_ Back at the Foundry, Oliver was running tests on the blood soaked gauze. His suspicions were confirmed when the gauze turned blue. He dropped it back into the pan as Matthew started to search on the

computer.\_

\_'The bullets were laced with curare, a rare and deadly poison, the killer's unique M.O. He's killed all over the world: Chicago, Markovia, Corto Maltese. Interpol even has a code name for him: Deadshot.' Floyd Lawton's photo appeared on the computer screen.\_

\_'We were prepared to give James Holder a chance to right his wrongs, but this Deadshot has no honor, morality, no code. He doesn't kill for justice, which makes him as dangerous as anyone on the List. In fact, it puts him right at the top.'\_

\_In an unfamiliar room, a man could be seen tattooing James Holder's name on his arm. When he was done he stood before the mirror, revealing other names tattooed in similar fashion on his chest and arms.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"That's sick," Barry muttered. Nyssa's lips thinned in disgust.<p>

"A moment, Mr. Jordan," Diggle cut in. "Will you pause the recording?" The screen froze as the bodyguard stood, staring intently at Deadshot. Cisco was about to make a joke but Ronnie, seeing the look on his friend's face, quickly elbowed him in the ribs in warning.

"Ow!" Cisco muttered as he glared at Ronnie.

"That bastard has my brother's name tattooed on his chest," Diggle growled at last. Everyone looked to where he indicated and saw that it was true - the name 'Andrew Diggle' was barely visible on Deadshot's left pectoral muscle.

"Jesus," Tommy breathed. "I'm sorry, Diggle." Malcolm glared at the screen, silently vowing that he would keep his eyes and ears open when they returned and if Deadshot ever showed up in Starling he would find himself facing the Dark Archer.

"A call on this man is long overdue," Ra's said icily. "I have reason to believe this Deadshot attempted to assassinate a League member four years ago. He didn't succeed in killing him outright, but my faithful servant suffered a slow agonizing death from the curare before he could return to Nanda Parbat. As Mr. Queen said, Deadshot has no morals. He hides in the shadows and uses poison in a cowardly way instead of looking his victims in the eye."

"Not that different from you, then, is it?" Joe snapped caustically.

"You're mistaken, Joe," Sara cut in before Ra's or Nyssa could speak. The Detective blinked at her in surprise. Sara continued, "The League does use poison, yes, but we do not do it in the manner Deadshot does." She gave him a hard stare. "Hard as it is to believe, we do have a code of honor. As Oliver said, Deadshot does not. Killing is nothing more than a job for him, and he cares nothing about who might end up in his way by accident."

Joe turned back to the screen, but he turned Sara's words over in his head. Hard as it was to admit, the girl might have a point.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver led Tommy and Diggle through the upper level of the Foundry.<em>

\_'So what do you think? Great spot for a nightclub or what?'\_

\_'Sweet,' Tommy said as he looked around. 'Though I got to tell you, man, if you're thinking about calling it 'Queens', I don't think you're gonna get the clientele that you were hoping for.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Roy, Cisco, and even Barry and Iris were unable to suppress snickers. Oliver and Tommy both glared at them. Malcolm shook his head; only his son would say something like that.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Private office,' Oliver said as he pointed toward the rear of the building.<em>

\_'For the private one-on-one meetings, I would imagine,' Tommy remarked with a smile. He lightly hit Oliver's shoulder.\_

\_'Hopefully the occasional two-on-one meeting,' Oliver said.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin Lance groaned in disgust. "You just had to say that, didn't you?" he demanded of Oliver. Oliver only raised an eyebrow, his expression betraying nothing. Joe and Eddie looked mildly disgusted as well. The younger women turned pink.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Tommy laughed, then looked at his friend. 'Man, are you sure you want to do this? It's not like you really have any experience in running a - well, running anything.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Neither do you, Tommy," Thea needled him, "so I hardly think you can point out Oliver's lack of experience." Tommy scowled at her. Malcolm snorted in disdain.<p>

"If you would take a position at Merlyn Global, Tommy," the businessman reminded his son pointedly, "you would gain experience as well."

"Not happening," Tommy shot back, his scowl deepening. "I don't want a boring office job."

Quentin rolled his eyes. \_Christ, \_\_am I the only one in our group who is a decent parent? Moira ignored her daughter and maybe her son,

and the Merlyns are far more screwed up.\_

"Mr. Merlyn," Dr. Stein said in a tone of gentle rebuke, "if your son does not want to join your company, then you shouldn't press him."

Malcolm glared at the older man. "Forgive me," he said pointedly, "but that is a matter between my son and myself, no one else."

"Oh, stop being an asshole, Merlyn," Quentin spat. "I've always thought you were a jerk, but this is unbelievable." Malcolm's expression turned icy and he was about to speak when Ra's intervened.

"I suggest, Mr. Merlyn, Detective Lance, that we set this matter aside for now and watch the recordings." The Demon's Head gave his former Horseman a hard stare.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver stared at him, and Tommy rushed on, 'How about tomorrow night the two of us, we go and scope out the competition. There's a new club opening downtown. It's called Poison. Max Fuller owns it.'<em>

\_'Max Fuller?' Oliver repeated.\_

\_'Mm-hmm.' \_

\_'I slept with his fiancée,' Oliver reminded him with a small smile.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra groaned. "Oh, Oliver ..." Oliver looked faintly embarrassed.<p>

Laurel turned and glowered at her ex-boyfriend. "Just how many other women did you sleep with behind my back?" she demanded.

"Honestly?" Oliver shrugged. "I don't know." He cut Laurel off as she was about to object. "Laurel, I'm not proud of my behavior back then, but you were partly responsible for that, lest you forget." Laurel reddened.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Yeah, before the wedding,' Tommy said with a shrug<em>

\_'It was at the rehearsal dinner.' \_

\_'The rehearsal dinner is technically before the wedding, right?' They both laughed. 'And besides, who stays mad at a castaway?' Tommy pulled out his phone to check the time. 'Ah, dammit, I got to roll.' He slid the phone back into his pocket. 'Anyway, I'll see you later, man. Good place! See you,' he added to Diggle as he left.\_

\_'So what do you think?' Oliver asked, turning to his bodyguard.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Diggle snorted in surprise. "You're asking my opinion?" he said, giving Oliver an incredulous look. Talia and Dusan both snickered.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Well, I'm here to provide security, sir, not a commentary,' Diggle hedged.<em>

\_'Oh, come on, Dig, do me a favor,' Oliver said earnestly. 'Speak freely, please.'\_

\_Diggle nodded slowly. 'Well, this is the Glades, right? Your rich friends wouldn't come to this neighborhood on a bet.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Roy snorted and muttered, "Unless they want the drugs in the Glades."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I am Oliver Queen, right?' Oliver stressed. 'People would stand in line for three hours if I opened a club.'<em>

\_'And no one who actually lives in the Glades would see a penny of those cover charges,' Diggle reminded him.\_

\_'So we make it a successful business, we gentrify the neighborhood,' Oliver argued.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm's eyebrows shot up. <em>Surely Oliver cannot be serious, <em>he thought. If the boy did go through with his foolish plan, he would have to take action to shut him down.

Similar thoughts were going through Moira's mind. She had to admit that Oliver's words had surprised her since he had never shown much interest in the Glades before, but at the same time, she felt a flicker of pride at the fact that her son was possibly considering doing the same thing her brother-in-law had done to help the people of Gotham - if Malcolm's enforcer didn't come after him. That was what frightened her.

Walter smiled slightly. It seemed his eldest stepson was willing to do something that Robert had not. Like Moira, he recalled how Thomas Wayne had devoted his time to helping the poor in Gotham. Although everything Thomas had accomplished had fallen apart after his death - by now Carmine Falcone and the Mob were firmly in control of Gotham and the city was disintegrating day by day, if his recent conversations with Lucius Fox were any indication - Thomas had still been more committed to his city than Robert had. His smile faded. Robert had been a close friend, but they had sometimes butted heads over helping the poor in Starling.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I was wondering when we would get to that,' Diggle said with

some amusement. 'The white knight swooping in to save the disenfranchised. And all by his lonesome with no help from anybody.'

\_Oliver scoffed. 'Wow. You don't think very much of me, do you?'\_

\_'No, sir. Actually, I have a very high regard for how perceptive you are. Sir.' With that Diggle left as Oliver took a last look around.\_

\_'The nightclub will conceal our base underneath and provide an alibi for where Oliver and Matthew Queen spend their nights.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Smart," Malcolm remarked. "Who would think to find their secret lair under a nightclub?" Moira shot him a sour look.<p>

Quentin looked none too pleased, either, shooting Oliver a dark scowl. Oliver quirked an eyebrow, an amused grin curling his lips. Tommy snickered.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At CNRI Laurel was reading a news article on Oliver's plan to open a club while she chewed absently on the end of a pen.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco, Iris, Barry, and Roy burst into laughter. "Internet stalker much?" Cisco teased. Laurel shot the younger adults a hard look.<p>

"Oh, don't look at us like that," Barry said, a grin on his face. Sara had to hide a smirk at seeing Laurel ruffled; her sister was usually so calm and collected.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Joanna's voice startled her. 'Hey, do you have the depositions on the Jergens case?'<em>

\_Laurel quickly closed the browser window, but not before Joanna saw what she had been looking at. She stood and flipped through the papers on her desk. 'Yeah, they're around here somewhere.' When she turned Joanna was regarding her with a flat stare. 'I was just surfing the 'net,' she said defensively.\_

\_'Really?' Joanna asked, her tone making it clear she didn't believe Laurel.\_

\_Laurel sighed. 'Joanna, I'm over him.' Joanna tilted her head. 'And you don't believe me.'\_

\_'Well, I would have if I wouldn't have just caught you trolling for articles on him!' Joanna shot back.\_

\_'I wasn't trolling!' Laurel snapped in exasperation.\_

\* \* \*

><p>More snickers from the others, even Thea and Tommy. Quentin shook his head in exasperation. Sara, noticing the questioning look on Nyssa's face at the use of a term unfamiliar to her, quickly explained it.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I don't want to have to be the one to remind you that he cheated on you, Laurel. With your sister.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Why bring it up in the first place then?" Laurel grouched. Oliver and Sara exchanged glances before focusing their attention back on the recording.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I appreciate your self control,' Laurel said tightly.<em>

\_'You're stuck in the past.' Laurel rolled her eyes as she looked through a stack of files. 'And the reason I know this is the fact that the only physical relationship you've had since Oliver is with his best friend.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Nice way to put it, Joanna," Tommy muttered. Laurel's face flamed.<p>

'Being quite blunt, wasn't she?" Iris added. Barry made a strangled sound in the back of his throat, prompting both his father and Joe to give him worried looks.

He waved them off, muttering, "It's nothing." Cisco snickered at the poor lie.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'It is time to move on. It is past time.' <em>

\_'I've been busy. I work a lot.' Laurel hoped that would end it.\_

\_'OK. That's got to stop.' They went back to Laurel's desk. 'So we are going out tonight. We are going to have some shots, and we are going to dance with men that we don't know, and we are going to stay out way too late.' Joanna pulled a file out of the stack. 'Oh! Jergens depos.'\_

\_'I really don't think I can go out tonight,' Laurel tried one last time.\_

\_'It is adorable that you actually think I'm giving you a choice,' Joanna replied with a smirk.\_

\_The following morning Thea was dressing for school when her mother

entered the room.\_

\_ 'I want you to come home right after school.' \_

\_ 'Oh, can't,' Thea replied flippantly. 'Margo and I are going to the mall.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Iris turned to look at the teenager with an incredulous look on her face. "Forgive me for saying this, Thea, but you are a spoiled, reckless child."<p>

"You don't know what I've been through!" Thea shouted, her voice cracking. "For almost five years I thought my brothers and my father were dead. My world fell apart overnight when I was only twelve. Who are you to judge me? You've never experienced the loss of a parent or a sibling!"

"That's enough, Thea!" Walter snapped, angered both by the teen's attitude and her verbal attack on Iris. Joe gritted his teeth, restraining the impulse to give the girl the slap he felt she so richly deserved. Barry glared at Thea.

"You're wrong, Thea," Iris said quietly after a moment. That brought Thea up short. "My mother died when I was very young." Thea's jaw dropped as she realized how cruel she had just been. Tommy pressed his lips together as memories of his own mother's death surfaced. "I know you miss your father and would do anything to have him back, but you are not the only one here who's lost a parent."

Joe internally winced as he thought of Francine; he knew Iris would be shocked if she learned that her mother was actually still alive. Barry stared grimly at Thea. "Thea, you and your mother both suffered because of Mr. Queen's death, but you cannot pretend that you suffered the most. The rest of us have suffered just as much."

"They're both right, Thea," Oliver said quietly. "You are being selfish, thinking your problems trump everyone else's." His sister looked ashamed and stared down at her lap as the recording continued.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What, more shopping? Tell Margo you'll have to cancel. You're grounded for two weeks.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good," Quentin said roughly. "Maybe that will teach her some humility."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea looked at her mother in disbelief. 'Grounded? I've never been grounded.'<em>

\_ 'Well, you've never committed larceny before,' Moira replied pointedly.\_



\_ 'Since when do you care?' Thea scoffed, folding her arms.\_

\_ 'I've always cared. I'm your mother,' Moira replied as she came further into the room.\_

\_ 'Look, we've had a good thing going on the last five years. Why mess with that now? '\_

\_ Moira shook her head. 'No, we are paying off store owners to keep your record clean, so clearly it hasn't been working.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Eddie shook his head. "You should stop doing that, Mrs. Queen. I've seen it happen a few times in Keystone - the city's wealthy kids get in trouble, their parents pay off businesses or individuals to keep it quiet, then a few weeks later they break the law again."<p>

Malcolm couldn't repress a sneer at the cop. "And you're so familiar with this?"

Eddie sent the businessman a barbed glare. "Yes. I've seen enough of what the filthy rich pull to recognize them immediately - like your son and Oliver. Tell me, Mr. Merlyn, how many times have you bailed your son out even though you despise him? Is it only out of concern for the family name?"

"Enough!" Arthur Curry barked.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'And you're going to teach me,' Thea snorted, then grinned. 'It's Oliver, isn't it? His judgmental hypocrisy is rubbing off on you.'<em>

\_ 'That's a low blow, Thea,' Matthew said from behind them. He came forward and took his sister's hands in his own. 'Can't you see that Oliver doesn't want you to follow in his footsteps? Or me, for that matter.' Her eyes softened and he thought she would listen, but their mother's next words rekindled her defiance.\_

\_ 'No, I don't need Oliver to teach me how to parent you. You'll be home by 4:00,' Moira made clear.\_

\_ 'Or what?' Thea said snidely. 'You're going to call the cops on me? Tell them I say hi,' she finished as she walked past them, picked up her school bag, and left. Moira sighed in frustration as her son shook his head.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You really should have listened to Matt, Speedy," Tommy said.<p>

"Yeah, I should have," Thea muttered.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver walked through a section of the city near Holder's penthouse, scanning closely for anything usual as he replayed the night's events over and over in his mind. Eventually he jumped up the alley wall, to where a bullet hole was barely visible. Pulling a knife from his pocket, he carefully extracted the bullet.<em>

\_At SCPD headquarters, Quentin was sitting at his desk looking at the crime scene photos when Hilton entered with a file in his hand.\_

\_'Got ballistics back on the Holder murder,' Hilton said. 'They pulled two 7.62 millimeter bullets out of him. According to the stippling and size of the entry wound, they estimate the shots were fired from approximately a hundred yards away.'\_

\_Quentin snorted. 'A hundred yards? What, so the Hoods shoot him from another building, go over to his place, take out his security, and fire off a few arrows?' he asked skeptically.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew snorted. "Neither of us can move <em>that <em>fast," he said dryly.

"I know, I know," Lance rebutted. "Obviously I'm just thinking out loud here, no matter how crazy it seems."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'And according to his tox screen, his blood contained high concentrations of strychnos toxifera.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh, what?" Felicity said in confusion.<p>

"That's the medical term for curare, Miss Smoak," Talia told her.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What?' Lance asked, lost.<em>

\_'Curare. It's a kind of poison,' Hilton clarified.\_

\_'Oh. OK, so now we're switching from arrows to sniper \_\_bullets and poison. I'm not buying it.'\_

\_'We still found arrows on the scene,' Hilton pressed. 'Solid evidence the Hoods were there.' Lance stood. 'Where are you going?'\_

\_'I'm going to get my own evidence.' The Detective turned and left. Hilton sighed and dropped the file onto Lance's desk.\_

\_At the factory, the brothers were running a ballistics test on the bullet Oliver had brought back. '7.62 millimeter rounds,' Matthew noted as he looked at the information displayed on the computer screen. 'The money trail leads back to the Bratva - the Russian Mob. Finally some good luck.'\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>"What?" <em>Quentin Lance snarled. He turned to glare at the brothers with shock and loathing on his face. "I thought I saw the outline of a Bratva tattoo on your chest earlier, Oliver, but I wasn't entirely certain I was imagining things. Now I know I wasn't. How could you go and join the Bratva, and drag Matthew with you?" he demanded. "You almost had me convinced you had changed your ways, but I was wrong. Well?"

Joe West and Eddie Thawne were infuriated on hearing that Oliver and Matthew Queen had joined the Bratva. \_How could they do this? \_Eddie thought in disgust. \_Throw their lot in with traffickers of drugs, humans and sex slaves? \_

Similar thoughts were going through Joe's mind. He had started to develop a grudging respect for the brothers' commitment to justice and righting whatever wrongs Robert Queen had committed, but with this revelation, that respect had vanished. He shot Oliver a poisonous glare.

Iris West was uncertain how to feel about this. She had seen \*\*The Godfather \*\*before and had to admit it was a guilty pleasure of hers. At the same time, she was well aware of how ruthless the Mob could be and the crimes they often committed were unbelievable.

Laurel Lance felt sick as she realized she no longer really knew Oliver Queen at all. How could the playboy she had known and loved become this cold, remorseless killer and an agent for a despicable mob organization?

Caitlin Snow and Ronnie Raymond were caught off guard by the revelation. \_A Bratva agent? \_Ronnie wondered. \_How the hell did they manage that? \_Caitlin was profoundly disturbed by the implications behind it. As she turned to look at the brothers and saw the shuttered looks on their faces, she gave a low sigh and shook her head, knowing this would no doubt affect them deeply, even if they didn't show it.

Martin Stein was just as shocked as the others, but decided to wait and give the young men the benefit of the doubt.

Barry Allen thought that this revelation was cool, though judging from the expressions most of the others wore, they didn't share his view. Henry, on the other hand, was troubled and wondered how his son and Oliver had ever become friends.

Like Iris, Cisco Ramon had seen \*\*The Godfather \*\*and loved it, so he wasn't at all disturbed by the fact that the Queen brothers were associated with the Mob. Rather, he was wondering if he could persuade them to share some of their experiences with him.

Felicity Smoak, John Diggle, and Roy Harper were stunned, though the former two more than Roy. Felicity's hands were white as she gripped the arms of her chair. Diggle's lips thinned, though he refrained from looking at either brother. Roy, on the other hand, wondered what skills the castaways had picked up in the Bratva that would be useful in the Glades.

Walter, Moira, and Thea were dismayed at hearing that the two boys

they loved had joined a Mob organization. Moira felt a flash of guilt at knowing that it was hers, Robert's and Malcolm's fault that her sons had ended up falling in with the Bratva. She tried to repress a shudder at the thought of Matthew among the Bratva. Thea glanced sideways at her twin. Her dismay must have been clear on her face, for pain flickered in his eyes and he looked away, hunching his shoulders. She immediately felt guilty and reached over to take his hand. Walter hoped they wouldn't see too much of Oliver and Matthew's dealings with the Bratva, for he wasn't sure he wanted to see the questionable things his stepsons might be asked to do.

Tommy was shaken as he looked at his friend.

The only ones who were not surprised were the LOA members/former members. Malcolm Merlyn guessed that Oliver and Matthew must have somehow done a favor for a Bratva member for them to be admitted into the organization, as it was rare that outsiders were allowed in. He, too, had noted the tattoo on Oliver's chest earlier; the boy was a captain. It was not clear, however, if Matthew held a formal rank since he was so young.

Talia and Dusan al Ghul already knew the brothers were Bratva, for Matthew had told them about Anatoly Kyzanev and their time in Russia following the death of Baron Reiter and the dismantlement of Shadowspire.

Ra's and Nyssa were mildly impressed by the knowledge that the two vigilantes were in the Bratva - and using those connections to help unravel the mystery of Floyd Lawton.

Sara Lance knew it was none other than Anatoly who had made it possible for Oliver to become a captain, as it was his life that the brothers had saved on Lian Yu.

The tense silence lingered, thick enough that one could cut it with a knife, with Oliver avoiding the accusing eyes of his family, friends, and the Central City group while the LOA members reflected on what they had learned. Without warning Matthew stood and headed for the auditorium doors. Clark Kent rose, sending a cutting glare in Quentin Lance's direction as he did so, and followed the seventeen year old out. As the door closed behind them, the other two men came down the steps to stand before the frozen screen, commanding everyone's attention.

"You're going to have to realize that the world isn't how you'd like it to be," Hal Jordan said sternly. "Everyone in the Justice League has done things that would horrify every one of you. Sometimes we didn't have a choice. Other times the choices we made were deliberate. If anyone here thinks that Oliver and Matthew willingly join in the crimes the Bratva perpetuate, then you are a fool." Several harsh, albeit guilty, glares greeted that statement, but Jordan continued remorselessly, "We have had to compromise, sometimes in ways that cost us many nights of lost sleep, but we have never forgotten the principles we live by. I can assure you that Oliver and Matthew have not sunk so low as to forget the promise they made to Robert Queen. As has been said earlier, they had to do what was necessary to survive. If you can't accept them joining the Bratva, then you will have serious difficulties later on as we get into their later years back in Starling. I suggest you begin to make peace with that and remember that they are not the boys that those of you who

know them remember - or the monsters that all of you think they are." He gave the group a harsh look of warning before walking up to where Oliver still sat aloof. "Stay strong, Oliver. You are not alone." He gently squeezed Oliver's shoulder and gave him a reassuring smile before he and Arthur Curry sat back down.

Clark Kent and Matthew returned a few minutes later. The superhero was grim faced; the teen's eyes were red rimmed and he avoided looking at Moira or Thea. As he sat down, Talia wrapped her arms around his waist. He leaned back slightly, resting his head against her chest.

"We'll continue," Arthur Curry said, "but I caution you to try to keep an open mind. Do not be so quick to judge or condemn without hearing Oliver or Matthew out on why they do what they do."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Lance walked around the pool at Holder's penthouse. He knelt briefly to survey the pool, then lifted his gaze to the surrounding buildings, his look thoughtful.<em>

\_Later Oliver, in a baseball cap, made his way to a Russian auto repair shop. He removed the cap as he entered and approached the two men working on a Mustang. 'I'm looking for Alexi Leonov,' he said in Russian. The two men turned to regard him.\_

\_'There's no one here by that name,' one of them said in Russian.\_

\_Oliver shook his head. 'Not in your garage,' he responded, still in Russian. He took a step closing before continuing, 'In the basement underneath.'\_

\_The man who had replied to him did not move a muscle, but his gaze shifted. Abruptly the other man left his work and pulled a gun on Oliver.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Walter inhaled sharply as Moira gasped. Thea gripped Matthew's hand; he had to suppress a wince as her fingernails dug into his palm.<p>

"What the hell?" Tommy muttered. Even the others looked startled.

"Don't worry," Oliver said flatly. "He's not a threat to me."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver grabbed the man's hand and twisted, sending him to his knees, howling in pain. The other mechanic watched in disbelief as Oliver let his comrade go and rendered the gun useless, dropping it on the floor. Oliver pulled his shirt down for a moment to show them the tattoo on his chest. 'I'm Bratva,' he said in Russian.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>A rustle rippled through the room as everyone shifted in their

chairs, but no one said anything, keenly aware that their hosts would intervene if they lashed out again.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em> The man he had disarmed climbed to his feet and backed away. 'I want to see Alexi Leonov,' Oliver repeated.<em>

\_The man who had spoken stepped forward and bowed. 'Pleased to meet you,' he said in English. Oliver inclined his head.\_

\_Alexi Leonov led Oliver down the stairs to the basement under the shop that served as the headquarters of the Starling City branch of the Bratva. 'I apologize,' Alexi said. 'We meant no disrespect to a Captain. Particularly an American one. So, how can I be of assistance?' he asked as the two paused by a table. He began pouring two glasses of vodka.\_

\_Oliver took a deep breath before replying. 'I'm in the market for a hired gun. Someone the organization's used before. His calling card is a 7.62 millimeter gun laced with curare.'\_

\_'I know no man who uses such tools,' Alexi replied.\_

\_'But you can find out who does,' Oliver made clear.\_

\_'First, we will drink to each other's health, then I will look into the identity of this man you seek,' Alexi said as he handed Oliver his vodka. They lifted the glasses in a silent toast to each other and drank.\_

\_'Ahh.'\_

\_Alexi set his glass down and looked Oliver in the eye. 'I will also confirm that you are really Bratva captain. Should this not be the case, I will send my mechanic here -' he cut his eyes toward the man standing on the stairs ' - to find you and kill you and your family.' He gave Oliver an unpleasant smile. Oliver glanced at the man, then calmly back at Alexi.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew snorted darkly. "I have no doubt Alexi would have made good on his threat if Oliver was lying, but he's about to find out that what he heard is the truth."<p>

"How did you end up joining the Bratva, anyway?" Felicity asked, curiosity temporarily replacing her apprehension.

Both men were silent for so long that everyone thought they wouldn't answer, but finally Oliver said, "Our second year on Lian Yu, we became tangled up with a freighter, its crew, and a mad scientist who had come to the island looking for a serum that would benefit the human race." Sara had to suppress a wince as Nyssa slid an arm around her; she still wasn't proud of what she had done for Anthony while on the \*\*Amazo. \*\*"The scientist - Ivo was his name - had several prisoners on board the freighter. One of them was a Russian."

"He was in the Bratva and the two of you helped him escape, so he granted you a Captain's rank," Malcolm guessed shrewdly. Matthew

nodded.

"We finally made it to Russia almost a year ago, made contact with Anatoly, and he formally inducted us into the Bratva."

\* \* \*

><p><em>In his room Deadshot was in the process of tattoing another name on his body as a news broadcast played. 'Carl Rasmussen was found shot to death in his home earlier this evening. The police will not comment if there's a connection between Mr. Rasmussen's death and the murder of James Holder a few nights ago Mr. Rasmussen leaves behind a wife and three children.'

\* \* \*

><p>"Bastard," Eddie snarled.<p>

Walter frowned. "This worries me. Deadshot is targeting potential bidders for Unidac Industries. The question is: why? And who's his next target?"

Felicity suddenly groaned in dismay. "Aren't you considering bidding for Unidac, Mr. Steele?" Walter gave her a level stare and she added quickly, "I've heard gossip in the IT department."

"You're right, Miss Smoak," he said after a moment. "I am going to bid for Unidac."

"Then it makes it all the more imperative that we track this guy down before he decides to take a shot at you," Matthew growled.

"Let us handle it, Matthew," Quentin advised.

Dusan snorted in derision. "Forgive me, Detective, but I don't believe the SCPD is capable of finding and arresting such a dangerous man." The cop glared at him, but Dusan ignored it. "Deadshot is more dangerous to the SCPD officers than to Matthew and Oliver. I would be worried about the possibility that one of your friends would die from a bullet he won't even see coming."

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion, Detectives Lance and Hilton were discussing Rasmussen's murder with Moira and Walter.<em>

\_'It's a great loss,' Walter said. 'Carl was a titan.'\_

\_'A titan who was looking to buy out a company called Unidac Industries,' Hilton observed.\_

\_'Well, industries are something of a misnomer. UI's recent activity was actually looking into alternative energy,' Walter replied.\_

\_'I think the point my partner is trying to make is that Carl Rasmussen was the second bidder this week to lose his life,' Lance interjected.\_

\_'Are you implying something, Detective?' Moira asked, looking steadily at Lance.\_

\_ 'Well, only that your husband's looking into buying Unidac Industries and the competition seems to be dropping like flies.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara groaned in disgust. "Really, Dad?" she demanded. Thea, Walter, Oliver, and Matthew all glared at Quentin, who sighed in resignation as he ran a hand across his face. Nyssa eyed the Detective keenly; Taer-al-Safer's father was a good man, but too quick to let his emotions cloud his judgement where Oliver Queen's family was concerned. Joe and Eddie shook their heads, knowing that in Central and Keystone, a man like Lance who let personal issues interfere with his job would be relegated to desk duty.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Walter slid his arm around Moira's shoulders as she said icily, 'And I'm sure your veiled accusation has nothing to do with how you feel about my family?'<em>

\_ 'Unidac's in receivership, Detective,' Walter cut in, bringing Lance's gaze back to him. 'Ownership is subject to a liquidation auction, so that means there are many prospective buyers.\_ \_And the auction is tomorrow, so if I was taking out the competition, I have a lot of killing to do in a very short amount of time.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Most of the younger crowd groaned, even though they knew Walter was being sarcastic.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'We're just making the rounds with the interested buyers,' Hilton said defensively. 'Let them know to be careful.'<em>

\_ 'Oh, yes,' Moira replied sarcastically as she shifted on the sofa. 'And I'm overwhelmed that Detective Lance is concerned for our safety. Lance pursed his lips.\_

\_ 'Well, thank you for your concern, gentlemen. Our security consultant, Mr. Diggle -' Walter nodded in the bodyguard's direction ' - is taking all the necessary precautions.' \_

\_ 'Yeah. Right,' Lance muttered, and stood. 'Well, if you need us, we're just a 911 call away.' The cops left as Walter and Moira exchanged looks.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm and Moira had both kept their faces carefully blank at the beginning of the conversation, but by the end, Moira was giving Quentin a harsh look. The cop shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "I'm just trying to do my job," he protested.<p>

"Well, your dislike of Oliver is making it hard to believe anything you say," she snapped.

\* \* \*



><p><em>At Poison Oliver and Tommy were waiting to enter. 'Ha ha ha! Oh, my, this is going to be killer,' Tommy crowed.<em>

\_'If Max never sees me here, I agree,' Oliver replied. \_

\_'Ah, if you want to run a business, you've got to take a few risks,' Tommy pointed out. \_

\_The bouncer blocked Diggle as he tried to enter behind the two young men. 'I don't see your name on the list.' \_

\_'Mr. Queen,' Diggle called. \_

\_The friends turned and walked back up to the chain. 'Oh! I have never seen this guy before in my life. Ever,' Oliver proclaimed, pointing at Diggle. They walked toward the floor, leaving an exasperated Diggle behind. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco and Barry tied unsuccessfully to stifle their snickers as Diggle glared at them.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the bar Laurel shook her head in resigned amusement as she spotted Oliver and Tommy. At the same moment Tommy saw her and pushed through the crowd. 'Oh, wow. Doesn't you going out and having fun violate some kind of law, you know, like the ones that are carved on a stone tablet?' he asked jokingly.<em>

\_'That's cute, Tommy,' she replied, her amusement vanishing. \_

\_'Thanks.' \_

\_'I can see you two are up to your old hunting patterns,' she said wryly, looking back and forth between him and Oliver. \_

\_'Just seeing what passes for fun in Starling City after five years,' Oliver offered. \_

\_'Ah. Well, I'm sure you'll find that it just hasn't been the same without you.' \_

\_Any further conversation was cut off as a very drunk Thea stumbled up to the trio. \_

\* \* \*

><p>"This is becoming a habit with you, Thea," Tommy observed. She glared at him, but it lacked any real heat; she was tired of seeing herself drunk and hoped it would end soon.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Big brother! Oh!' she exclaimed, holding on to him. 'I am so wasted right now.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"I think that's a understatement," Caitlin observed dryly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There is - there is two of you,' she finished, waving a finger. Laurel and Tommy both looked disconcerted, turning to the bar.<em>

\_'I thought you were grounded,' Oliver reminded her sternly.\_

\_'I am. And thank you for that, by the way,' Thea shot back.\_

\_'You're done for the night,' Oliver said firmly, glaring at her.\_

\_'Oh! What are you going to do? Tell Mom?' she asked defiantly.\_

\_'Thea!' Oliver snapped, exasperated. 'You are hanging with the wrong people.'\_

\_Her eyebrows shot up. 'You're one to talk. How much do you know about your own so called friends over here?' she said almost gleefully. Tommy and Laurel turned to them on hearing that.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel scowled at Thea. "I know where this is going, but did you have to be so spiteful, Thea? You deliberately wanted to hurt Oliver because you didn't like the way he was showing concern for your lifestyle, but revealing my and Tommy's relationship? That was low."<p>

"If I hadn't already known about it the night after the party, I would have been hurt when Thea told me," Oliver added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'OK, Thea, maybe you should -' Tommy tried to stop her, worried about what she might say, but Thea didn't let him finish.<em>

\_'Tommy, I think your BFF has a right to know,' she said snidely.\_

\_'Thea, let's go,' Oliver interrupted, but she was having none of it.\_

\_'Well I guess they never told you that they've been screwing while you were gone.' Laurel looked at the floor as Oliver stared at his sister. Thea looked over at Laurel and Tommy with a wicked smile. Tommy took a deep breath and glanced at Laurel before looking back at Oliver.\_

\_'Look, man, I -' he started.\_

\_'Tommy, it's OK,' Oliver cut him off. He turned back to his

sister.\_

\_'You and me, we're done for the night,' he told Thea, taking her by the arm.\_

\_She jerked away. 'Take your hands off of me! You're not my father. And you're barely my brother.' With that she stalked off, leaving an angry Oliver behind.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin, Malcolm, and Moira glared at the three younger adults, who shifted uncomfortably under the weight of their parents' disapproval.<p>

Roy observed the reaction with interest. His parents' marriage hadn't been stellar - his father's love for his mother had grown cold in the last few years before Roy Sr's death - but they had both remained faithful to their wedding vows. He could not quite believe the ease with which the idle rich seemed to sleep around. \_What is it that compels people like the Queens and the Merlyns to do so? \_he wondered.

Ra's eyed Al-Sa-Her's son and Taer-al-Safer's sister keenly. He was mildly surprised that it appeared Thomas Merlyn did not have any illegitimate children running around, as from what he had seen and heard so far, both him and Oliver Queen had slept with many different women before the sinking of the \*\*Queen's Gambit\*\*. Ra's glanced at Al-Sa-Her. His former Horseman seemed displeased at the reminder of his son and Miss Lance's relationship.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver was not to be left with his thoughts for long; a familiar, mocking voice came from behind him. His eyes hardened.<em>

\_'Well, well, look at this. Oliver Queen.'\_

\_Slowly Oliver turned to face him. 'Max Fuller.' He gave the club owner an insincere smile. 'How you been?'

\_'Happy you drowned.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What an ass," Laurel muttered. Tommy nodded in agreement.<p>

"Fool and whiner," Dusan sneered. Matthew gave a bark of laughter.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Max and his bodyguards prodded Oliver along to a back room. He turned to Max as they entered. 'Hey, Max -' he started, but Fuller promptly punched him in the jaw, sending him to the floor. Oliver clenched his hand into a fist before forcing himself to relax.<em>

\_'Get him up!' Fuller ordered. The bouncers dragged Oliver to his

feet just as Tommy burst in.\_

\_ 'Hey, let him go, let him go!' Tommy shouted. He positioned himself between the bouncers and Oliver. 'Hey, I said let him go!'\_

\_ Fuller crossed his arms in amusement as Oliver cut in, 'Told you he was going to be pissed.'\_

\_ 'Back off, Merlyn,' Fuller said. 'This isn't your problem.'\_

\_ 'You want to get to him? You've got to go through me,' Tommy announced.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm's eyebrows shot up as he looked at his son. Tommy, however, was looking at Oliver, who gave his friend a small smile, touched by his loyalty. Everyone else was just as surprised by Tommy's words and actions.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Wow, they are probably going to get through me,' Tommy remarked to Oliver as the bouncers tensed. A split second later Tommy threw the first punch, and the fight was on.<em>

\_ The bouncers laid mercilessly into the young men; with Oliver purposely not showing his true fighting skills and Tommy having no skill at all, it seemed they would lose.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Barry, Cisco, and Ronnie all winced at the pounding the friends were receiving, for they knew they wouldn't be able to stand up to goons like Fuller's either.<p>

"Commendable effort, Mr. Merlyn," Diggle remarked, looking at Tommy, "but without self defense skills men like them would make mincemeat of you. If your father approves, I could teach you," he offered.

Malcolm gave the former soldier a nod. "I'll take it under consideration, Mr. Diggle."

"Why didn't you just drop the act then?" Barry asked, looking at Oliver. "I mean, you could have laid all of them out flat in seconds."

"I could have," Oliver conceded, "but if I had, then a lot of people would have become suspicious about my behavior and lifestyle. If the wrong people dug too deep, mine and Matt's cover would have been blown and Mom, Thea, and Robbie's lives endangered."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Max Fuller watched in satisfaction -<em>

\_ until he was abruptly yanked through the curtains by Laurel. She kned him several times in the back before flipping him back into the room, where he lay groaning. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Iris laughed and gave Laurel a thumbs up. "Self defense classes?"<p>

"Yeah," Laurel replied with a satisfied smile.

"Same here." Joe and Quentin exchanged grins.

Sara snickered at the dazed look on Max Fuller's face. Laurel looked back at her, the smile still on her lips.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The bouncers stopped short when they saw her.<em>

\_'So is this over, Max?' she asked harshly. 'Or are you going to have your boys pound on me next? '\_

\_'Max scrambled to his feet as Oliver and Tommy picked themselves up. 'You three consider yourselves banned for life. Get the hell out of my place!' he snarled. '\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, for Pete's sakes, Fuller, stop acting like a two year old," Matthew mocked. "Temper tantrums ill become you." Thea and Roy both snickered. Talia grinned in vicious amusement at her beloved's tear down of Fuller's attitude. Moira arched a startled eyebrow as Malcolm grinned at her.<p>

"Seems your son has inherited your sharp tongue, Moira."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Your club sucks anyway,' Tommy shot back as Fuller and the bouncers retreated.<em>

\_'You guys OK?' Laurel asked. '\_

\_'Where'd you learn to do that?' Oliver asked, impressed by what she had done. '\_

\_'Cop dad, remember? He made me take self defense classes,' she replied. '\_

\_'Laurel, what Thea said -' he paused, trying to find the right words, but Laurel spoke before he could. '\_

\_'Oliver, Tommy and I don't need your blessing. And I don't need your forgiveness.' '\_

\_'Ah,' was all he said as she left. '\_

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\*

\_'Oliver roused from his slumber. Seeing that their rescuer - if he could be called that - was fast asleep, he painfully struggled to sit up before gently shaking Matthew awake. The boy looked up at him with

bleary eyes; Oliver put a finger to his lips and tilted his head toward the cave entrance. Slowly, painfully, Matthew struggled to his feet, biting back a whimper as he put weight on his injured leg. Oliver was on his feet a second later. They hurried from the cave into the sunlight and dashed through the trees as fast as they could run, but had to stop after a few minutes to rest. Oliver looked down and noticed the widening bloodstain on his shirt. Matthew was pale and his pants leg was turning crimson. They pushed themselves on, wanting to get further away - and blundered straight into a trap. The net closed around them both and hoisted them into the air.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh-oh," Thea muttered.<p>

"How did you get out of this one?" Tommy wondered.

"Yao Fei," Matthew replied.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_Diggle led the younger men into Big Belly Burger. 'Why don't you guys take a seat, and I will grab a couple of burgers and some ice for those faces,' he offered. He waved at a waitress, who returned it.\_

\_'The girl's pretty cute,' Tommy observed.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Diggle, Malcolm, and Laurel glared at Tommy. He flushed crimson. Roy rolled his eyes, muttering under his breath, "Creep."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'That's my sister-in-law,' Diggle said flatly.<em>

\_'Who I will never speak to or look at,' Tommy immediately promised. 'Ever. Gonna grab a booth.'\_

\_'She's not wearing a wedding ring,' Oliver observed. 'Brother out of the picture?'\_

\_'Yeah, you could say that,' Diggle said sadly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Diggle," Moira said. The bodyguard nodded silently.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>He walked over to join her as Oliver went to the booth Tommy had chosen. 'Hey, you.'<em>

\_'So sweet of you to adopt two white boys,' she replied, looking briefly at Tommy and Oliver. 'They need a good role model.'\_

\_ 'That's my client - Oliver Queen,' Diggle told her, pointing Oliver out.\_

\_ 'Looks like you're doing a bang up job protecting him,' she remarked.\_

\_ 'Mmm.' \_

\_ In the booth, Tommy said uncertainly, 'Look, man, about Laurel. I was going to tell you. I was just trying to figure out the right way.' \_

\_ 'To tell somebody that you slept with their girlfriend after they were missing and presumed dead,' Oliver replied flatly. There was a pause. 'What, there'd no greeting card for that?' Tommy chuckled as Oliver smiled slightly.\_

\_ 'Look, it was wrong. And I'm sorry -' \_

\_ 'Tommy,' Oliver interrupted. 'I was dead.' \_

\_ 'No, man, you were with Laurel,' Tommy replied. 'And whether you were dead, or as it turns out, alive on a deserted island, you are my friend. And me being with Laurel violated that friendship in about fifty different ways,' he said seriously.\_

\_ 'Thank you. But it's OK,' Oliver told him. \_

\_ At the bar Carly and Diggle were still talking. 'How dangerous is this gig, anyway?' \_

\_ 'It's a cakewalk, Carla, don't worry,' he tried to reassure her.\_

\_ 'Too late,' she said softly. 'Or have you forgotten this job got your brother killed?' Diggle looked away. 'Because, Dig, I haven't. I can't.' She walked off.\_

\_ Back at the booth, Tommy said, 'You are being really chill about this. I -' \_

\_ The ring of Oliver's cell phone interrupted them. He pulled it out of his pocket and answered. 'Hello?' He said something in Russian before looking at Tommy. 'It's a Russian model calling me.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco, Barry, Felicity, and Thea burst into astonished laughter at Oliver's brazen lie. Matthew smirked and nudged Oliver's arm, his smile widening as his older brother shot him a sour look.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Can we - can I have a minute, please?' Tommy laughed incredulously, but held up his hands.<em>

\_ 'I can see now why you were able to be so chill. Enjoy.' He slid out of the booth.\_

\_Oliver returned the phone to his ear. 'So I checked out?'\_

\_'You did,' Alexi Leonov said. 'His name is Floyd Lawton. I have address where he stayed last time he was in Starling City. But that is all.'\_

\_'Let's hope he's a creature of habit,' Oliver replied. 'Go.' Alexi gave him the address.\_

\_'You'll leave us out of this, yes?' Alexi added before ending the call. 'Assuming Mr. Lawton doesn't kill you first.' Oliver returned the phone to his pocket, a grim expression on his face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"That was fast," Tommy said in amazement.<p>

"The Bratva are very good at this," Ra's clarified. "Very good."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later Deadshot was in his hotel room, looking over the plans for the Exchange Building on his laptop. He rolled his head from side to side to loosen the muscles in his neck.<em>

\_In the hallway outside, Oliver and Matthew stealthily approached Deadshot's door. After his phone call with Leonov, Oliver had filled his brother in, and now the two of them were preparing to take Deadshot out.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra shuddered, hoping both her sons would walk away without a scratch this time.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Inside, Deadshot stopped to listen. An instant later Matthew flung the door open and loosed an arrow. The arrow embedded in the back of the chair as Deadshot dived for the floor and came back up with his gun. He began to fire. Bullets flew around the room as the brothers pressed themselves against the wall. Frustrated, Deadshot tried to zero in on them. Matthew jumped away from the wall and loosed another arrow. Lawton raised his mattress to block it, then sprayed one final blast of bullets from his gun before leaping through the window. Outside police sirens could be heard, drawing closer. Matthew ran to the window and looked out, but there was no sign of Lawton. As they retreated from the room, Oliver grabbed the sniper's laptop.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Nyssa shook her head. "That was a poor attempt to stop Lawton, Oliver Queen. Regardless of the fact that he had his specialized weapon, one arrow would have finished the job." Oliver gave the Heir to the Demon a hard look, then nodded. He wasn't too pleased with her assessment of their technique there, but he knew she had a point - they could have ended it with a clean arrow to the head.<p>

\* \* \*



><p><em>The next day at Queen Consolidated, Oliver walked through the IT department before stopping at a cubicle where a blond woman was intent on her work.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Looks like this is where you come in," Thea remarked, glancing at Felicity. All eyes turned to the surprised IT tech.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>He cleared his throat. 'Ahem.' She looked up at him. 'Felicity Smoak? Hi. I'm Oliver Queen.'<em>

\_'Of course. I know who you are, you're Mr. Queen,' she replied.\_

\_'Oliver shook his head slightly. 'No, Mr. Queen was my father.'\_

\_'Right, but he's dead. I mean, he drowned. But you didn't, which means you could come down to the IT department and listen to me babble. Which will end. In three ... two ... one.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea looked amused at seeing her brother's interaction with Felicity. The IT genius herself looked embarrassed at the way she had chattered on - to the CEO's stepson, no less. The others were trying to hide their own amusement, though Cisco was sympathetic to the woman's embarrassment - he had made enough faux pas in conversation himself to know that it was not fun.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver laid the laptop on her desk. 'I'm having some trouble with my computer and they told me that you were the person to come and see,' he lied smoothly. She examined it for a moment, then eyed him. 'I was at my coffee shop surfing the Web and I spilled a latte on it,' he clarified.<em>

\_'Really?' Felicity asked, her tone making clear she didn't believe him.\_

\_'Yeah,' Oliver deadpanned.\_

\_'Cause these look like bullet holes,' she noted. \_

\_'My coffee shop is in a bad neighborhood,' he offered. She tilted her head and pinned him with a hard stare. He gave her a half smile. 'If there is anything that you can salvage from it, I would really appreciate it.' She finally nodded.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Felicity turned and frowned at Oliver, her earlier embarrassment gone. "Don't think of using those poor cover stories when we get back," she said pointedly. Oliver only nodded, knowing she was right.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea was in her room surfing on her Ipad when her mother entered with two dresses on her arm. 'Oh. Well, good, you're here.'<em>

\_'I'm under house arrest, remember?' Thea replied without looking up.\_

\_'Do you want to wear the Calvin Klein or the Zac Posen?' Moira asked.\_

\_'Thea finally looked at her. 'For dinner? I was just going to wear pajamas.'\_

\_'To Walter's stock auction,' Moira clarified.\_

\_'I think I'd rather be grounded,' Thea grumbled.\_

\_'No, it's important that you come.'\_

\_'Important to who?' Thea scoffed.\_

\_'Moira turned to her daughter. 'To me.' She sighed at Thea's disbelieving look, then came to sit on the bed.\_

\_'All right, listen to me,' she said, laying a hand on her daughter's knee. 'When you were four years old, you came home on day with a cat. It was a stray, it was filthy, and it was mean. But you stood there and you declared that it was coming to live with us. Your father came home from the office and he saw what was going on, and he sat you down and he explained to you that the cat was in fact a tiger and that we needed to get it home. And somehow you understood.' Thea was listening intently now. Moira looked away. 'Robert was always so good at getting through to you. I - I was always so jealous of that,' she admitted with a shake of her head.\_

\_'You never talk about him. Dad,' Thea said softly, her eyes meeting her mother's. 'That's the first time you've talked about him in years.' \_

\_'Moira was silent for a moment. 'Well, I think you and I have gotten into some bad habits. There's been a lot that has changed recently, Thea, and I think that maybe this can change too.' She rose and left, leaving a contemplative Thea alone.\_

\_'At Queen Consolidated, Felicity had managed to retrieve important information from Lawton's laptop. 'It looks like blueprints,' she told Oliver.\_

\_'Do you know what of?' he asked.\_

\_'The Exchange Building,' she replied.\_

\_'Never heard of it.'\_

\_'It's where the Unidac Industries auction is scheduled to take place.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Keep Thea away from the Exchange Building," Matthew suddenly snapped tightly. "If Deadshot still tries to pull this off after we return, I don't want her anywhere near the area that night."<p>

"It won't happen, beloved," Talia said firmly. "We will track Lawton down and ensure he remains behind bars. He won't endanger Thea, your mother, or Mr. Steele." Everyone else looked grim at the reminder that Walter would be in danger at the auction.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I thought you said that was your laptop,' she said slowly, staring at him.<em>

\_'Yes,' he replied glibly.\_

\_'Felicity sighed. 'Look, I don't want to get into the middle of some Shakespearean family drama thing.'\_

\_'What?'\_

\_'Mr. Steele marrying your mom.' At his blank look, she pressed on. 'Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet?'\_

\_'I didn't study Shakespeare at any of the four schools that I dropped out of,' he replied.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tommy, Laurel, Caitlin, and Ronnie shook their heads, though amused grins crept over their faces. Felicity flushed as she realized that she had once again put her foot in her mouth.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Mr. Steele is trying to buy Unidac Industries,' Felicity said. 'And you've got a company laptop associated with one of the guys he's competing against.'<em>

\_'Floyd Lawton,' Oliver muttered, his thoughts on Deadshot.\_

\_'No,' Felicity corrected, 'Warren Petel.' He looked at her in surprise. 'Who's Floyd Lawton?' she asked.\_

\_'He is an employee of Mr. Petel, evidently,' Oliver mused. Felicity eyed him curiously but said no more. Oliver studied the blueprints again.\_

\_'The Exchange Building is surrounded by three towers with eye lines into the building. Lawton could get a kill shot off from virtually anywhere. But we can't cover the area. We can't protect all of Deadshot's targets. We can't do this alone.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, shit," Quentin muttered darkly. Sara only laughed and Nyssa's lips twitched in an amused smile.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the factory Matthew was pacing as Oliver sat at the computer. 'This doesn't make sense,' the younger boy said. 'There's going to be several competitors at the auction tonight, yes, but I don't believe Deadshot would try to take all of them out at once. He could very well try, but I think he's only going after one in particular.' He inhaled sharply and turned to Oliver, the blood draining from his face. 'Walter.'<em>

\_That night Lance exited the SCPD and headed to his car. Abruptly someone grabbed him from behind and forced his head down onto the hood of a cruiser. He groaned, but managed to twist his head to see the Scarlet Archer standing behind him, holding one arm in a vise.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Joe and Eddie both grimaced. "Being a little rough, aren't you?" Eddie said, glancing at Matthew. The teen shrugged.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You son of a bitch!' he gasped.<em>

\_ 'Detective, quiet!' the Hood hissed in a whisper.\_

\_ 'You've got a pair on you, pulling this right outside the police station!' Lance snarled.\_

\_ 'Floyd Lawton's the one targeting the buyers interested in Unidac Industries,' the archer said, ignoring Lance's ire. 'Interpol calls him 'Deadshot' because he never misses. You can look this up after I go.' \_

\_ 'Yeah, and stop chasing you, I suppose?' Lance grunted as the Hood applied pressure to his arm.\_

\_ 'Warren Petel hired Lawton. I can't be sure who they're targeting, it might be all the buyers, and we can't protect them in a space that big. We need your help.' \_

\_ 'Yeah?' Professional help,' Lance scoffed.\_

\_ 'Lawton laces his bullets with curare. Tell your men to wear Kevlar.' \_

\_ 'I'll tell them to shoot you -' An arrow flew into the hood of the cruiser beside his head, and the pressure on his arm was gone. He straightened and looked around wildly, but the Hood had vanished. He looked back to the cruiser and noticed the laptop for the first time.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tommy, Roy, and Cisco snickered at the sour look on the Detective's face.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the Exchange Building Walter and Moira talked quietly while they waited for the auction to begin. 'Well, it's quite a turnout, huh?' she remarked.<em>

\_'Well, it's quite an opportunity, actually,' Walter replied with a smile. 'But regardless of the outcome of the auction, I'm already a winner because I have the two most beautiful women at my side tonight.'\_

\_'Two?' Moira queried.\_

\_'Mmm-hmm.' Moira followed the direction of her husband's gaze to see Thea enter with Matthew directly behind her. Thea wore a tasteful blue dress, Matthew a formal suit and tie.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Talía laughed softly. "You look quite handsome, Matthew." He grinned lightly.<p>

"I have to agree, Talía," Moira said with a smile. She glanced at her son with a warm look in her eyes. A genuine smile curled his lips at his mother's compliment.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Thanks for coming, Thea, Matthew,' Walter told them, kissing her on the cheek before shaking hands with his stepson. 'It means a lot to your mother. And me.' They both smiled and hugged Moira.<em>

\_'Mr. Steele, the auction will be opening in five minutes,' a woman told them. 'Please make sure your bid is ready.'\_

\_'Walter nodded in acknowledgement. 'Thank you, Gina.' He turned to his family. 'Shall we?'\_

\_'Matthew swept his eyes around as they entered the main room, noting the cops who approached Petel. A slight smile curled his lips. 'Warren Petel. I'm going to need you to come with me, sir.'\_

\_'Elsewhere in the room, reports came over Detective Lance's radio as his fellow officers checked in. 'Unit One, all clear. Unit Two, you copy?'\_

\_'We have Petel in custody. Still no sign of Lawton.'\_

\_'Unit Three?'\_

\_'I'm at the northwest perimeter. All clear.'\_

\_'Unit Four?'\_

\_'Parking structure is clear.'\_

\_'Unit Five, what's your status?'\_

\_'Across the street in an under construction office building, Deadshot picked the radio up, paying no attention to the dead cop at his feet.

'This is Unit Five. All clear.' He tossed the radio back to the ground.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Growls of disgust and rage came from the Detectives, Barry, and the brothers on seeing the dead cop. "Oh, crap," Laurel muttered. Ra's leaned forward, interested to see how Deadshot was dealt with this time.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the courthouse Laurel was about to leave for the night when a voice stopped her short. 'Oh, what a shock.' She turned to see Tommy sitting on a bench. He smiled. 'It is Friday night. What are you doing here?'<em>

\_ 'Well, I am an attorney and this is a courthouse, so I think the better question is, what are you doing here?' she asked archly.\_

\_ Tommy paused for a moment. 'I wanted to talk to you about last night.' \_

\_ 'You mean how I saved your asses? You're welcome.' \_

\_ 'OK, first of all,' Tommy started as he stood, 'we shall never, ever speak of that ever again. And secondly, I think you know that I meant the other thing.' \_

\_ 'I don't care to talk about that,' she said flatly, starting past him.\_

\_ 'I spoke to Oliver. He was surprisingly cool.' That stopped her short.\_

\_ 'That's because he knew.' Tommy stared at her in disbelief. 'Did you see his face when Thea told him? Tommy, he didn't even blink. Trust me, he knew.' \_

\_ 'Then why didn't he say anything?' Tommy demanded, bewildered.\_

\_ 'I don't know,' she confessed. 'Maybe because he knows he doesn't have any right to judge me.' \_

\_ 'There's a silver lining, though,' Tommy said after a moment. 'Now that the whole truth and nothing but is out, is there a chance now for you and me?' Laurel stared at him for a second, then lowered her eyes.\_

\_ 'You said you didn't think that I was a one girl type of guy. I'm going to prove you wrong.' \_

\_ Laurel found her voice. 'By dating me.' \_

\_ 'By being better,' he corrected. 'By being someone that you deserve and that you want to be with.' \_

\_ 'Well, that's certainly a guy I'd be interested in meeting.' Tommy smiled at that.\_

\_'Good. Now how about we start, ahem, by getting you the heck out of here.' He relieved her of the stack of files she was holding. 'Come on, it is Friday night.' He offered his other arm to her; she took it with an amused sigh. 'Come on.'\_

\_'Fine.'\_

\_'Good.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea, Iris, and Felicity all snickered, prompting Laurel to huff in irritation.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver arrived at the Exchange Building, making his way through the crowd, when he heard a familiar voice. 'Well, don't you scrub up nice?' Lance observed snidely.<em>

\_'Here to support my family,' Oliver rejoined.\_

\_'Yeah, me too, God help me,' Lance muttered crossly.\_

\_'Thank you,' Oliver said quietly. Lance scoffed and walked away.\_

\_Oliver made his way to Diggle. 'Dig, got your eyes open?'\_

\_'That's what I'm here for, sir,' he said in annoyance. 'That and answering patronizing questions.'\_

\_Oliver ignored the remark. 'This guy's out of time. If he's going to do something, it's going to happen before the auction.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Everyone's eyebrows shot up as they realized what Oliver was doing. Diggle himself was especially surprised.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Sir?' Diggle queried. <em>

\_'I heard the story on the radio,' Oliver lied smoothly.\_

\_'Oliver!' Oliver walked over to Walter. 'So pleased you were able to attend.'\_

\_Across the street, Deadshot was setting up his sniper's roost. He trained the laser sight on Walter and Oliver.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirira blanched and gripped her husband's hand. Thea leaned against Oliver for comfort.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Walter, the police said that some of the Unidac bidders were murdered,' Oliver said quietly. 'I just think that we should be a little bit more careful. My mother's already lost a husband.'<em>

\_'Well, if Moira shared your concern, she wouldn't have come. And she definitely wouldn't have brought the twins.' Oliver looked to where his mother and siblings stood and walked over. \_

\_'Hi.' \_

\_Deadshot trained the rifle on Walter's heart and placed his finger on the trigger.\_

\_Lance scanned the crowd.\_

\_'Oliver, what a wonderful surprise,' Moira said, but he ignored her, looking at Diggle as the bodyguard arrived. 'I need you to get them out of here right now.' He shot Matthew a look, one the teenager immediately understood.\_

\_In his perch Deadshot activated the laser sight once again. Quentin glanced at Walter, saw the red dot on his chest - and realized. He rushed forward, tackling Walter to the ground just as Deadshot fired. The bullet struck a waiter in the back, sending him crumpling. Chaos erupted as Deadshot sprayed fire into the building.\_

\_The brothers and Diggle hurried Moira and Thea toward the exit.\_

\_'Are you OK?' Matthew demanded of his sister. Thea nodded, though she looked pale and terrified. He looked at his mother. 'Are you hurt?'\_

\_'No, I'm fine!' she insisted. 'Where is Walter?' she asked, terrified that he was dead.\_

\_'Go, go, go, go!' Detective Lance shouted as he rushed Walter from the room.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira released the breath she had been holding. "Thank you, Quentin." The cop nodded.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Walter's fine,' Matthew reassured his frightened mother.<em>

\_'Sir, I have to get you out of here,' Diggle insisted, but Oliver shook his head.\_

\_'No, them,' he interrupted, jabbing a finger for emphasis. 'Them!' He grabbed Matthew's arm and hissed into his ear, low enough that the others would not hear, 'Go back, make sure they're safe, then meet me at the Foundry.' \_\_Matthew nodded grimly. Oliver ran off with his mother calling after him.\_

\_'Go, go,' Diggle ordered. 'I'll find him, ma'am, I'll find him,' he



tried to reassure Moira.\_

\_Oliver dashed up the service stairs, pausing briefly at the trash can where Matthew had hidden his disguise earlier - right in view of the security cams. He pulled out his duffel bag and grabbed his hood before continuing up the stairs. A few moments later Diggle ran up the stairs with his gun drawn. Noticing the open trash can, he took a quick look inside before continuing up.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You let yourselves be seen on security cams?" Thea asked in disbelief. "It's insane."<p>

Malcolm shook his head. "I suspect they knew the cams were there, Thea. They're up to something." He eyed Matthew shrewdly. "Am I right?"

"Possibly," Matthew deadpanned.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Across the street Deadshot continued to fire. He paused as outside, an arrow embedded in the building wall - and an instant later the Emerald Archer crashed through the window. Lawton immediately spun and fired, but Oliver rolled across the floor and ducked for cover. They traded shots for several seconds, then there was silence as Lawton cautiously stepped forward, looking for a killing shot.<em>

\_Oliver abruptly leaped from his concealment and sent Deadshot sprawling to the ground, but the assassin quickly sprang back to his feet. They traded blows for several seconds until Deadshot located his gun. He brought it up to fire, but Oliver jumped on top of the scaffolding and leaped on Deadshot, sending him over his back into a table, which split in two. Oliver was on him in an instant. They traded punches once more before Oliver pinned Deadshot with a knife to his throat. Deadshot broke Oliver's grip, causing him to grunt in pain. The sniper turned to flee, but Oliver caught him and tossed him aside - right to his gun. Oliver grabbed his bow at the same instant before ducking behind a column.\_

\_ 'Drop your guns,' Oliver shouted.\_

\_ 'I admire your work,' Lawton replied. 'Guess you won't be extending me any professional courtesy.' \_

\_ 'We're not in the same line of work,' Oliver snarled. 'Your profession is murder.' \_

\_ 'You've taken lives,' Deadshot retorted.\_

\_ 'For the good of others. You're out for yourself.' Deadshot snickered and lowered his gun - but only for an instant. Abruptly he whipped it back up and opened fire, spraying the column with bullets. Once the clip was empty, the Hood whirled and loosed an arrow in Deadshot's direction before ducking back behind the column. The gunfire abruptly stopped and he heard something hit the floor. After waiting a few more moments to be sure, he stepped out from his cover - \_

\_And saw Deadshot lying on the ground, apparently dead, with an arrow through his targeting eyepiece.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You got him!" Cisco exclaimed. Moira sighed in relief and Walter ran a hand across his face.<p>

"Thank you, Mr. Queen," Diggle said, turning to Oliver with a look of gratitude on his face. "Andy finally has the justice he deserves."

"I'm not so sure," Oliver said grimly. "Considering that Slade survived even after I shoved an arrow through his eye, what are the chances that Deadshot is really dead now?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver did not have long to contemplate his dead adversary, for a groan caught his attention. He spun to see Diggle slumped against the door frame behind him, wounded in the shoulder by one of Lawton's bullets.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, God," Felicity murmured shakily. Diggle went white as a sheet.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Without hesitation the vigilante sprinted to him and slid Diggle's arm around his shoulders, helping him away.<em>

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\*

\_Still imprisoned in the net, the brothers slept before a sound abruptly woke them. The stranger stood in front of the net with a machete in his hands. Oliver gasped.\_

\_'Fool,' Yao Fei said in Mandarin. 'This place is too dangerous for any one man to be alone.' He went to the tree and sliced through the rope, sending the net crashing to the ground. The brothers scrambled to free themselves from the tangle. 'They'll kill you,' the man declared before walking off. Oliver helped Matthew stand, gritting his teeth as he slung the boy's arm across his shoulders to support his weight. They made their way after the man as fast as they could.\_

\_A few moments later, a group of armed black clad soldiers appeared. One examined the broken net before tossing it aside.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"God, Oliver," Laurel murmured as the screen went black.<p>

"This is what you meant earlier, isn't it?" Henry Allen said quietly as he looked at Oliver. "Those are the mercenaries you spoke of, aren't they?"

"Correct, Dr. Allen," Oliver said coldly.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) The conversation between \*\*Clark Kent \*\*and \*\*Matthew\*\* after the Bratva revelation will be covered later in a separate one shot because I felt it would break the flow of the chapter to include it here.\_

## 5. Episode IV: An Innocent Man

\_Oliver helped Diggle down the steps into the Lair. Matthew was already waiting in his leathers. 'He was struck by a poisoned bullet,' Oliver told him. The elder Queen laid Diggle down on a table as Matthew went to retrieve the herbs and a bowl of water. He mixed the two together into a paste and handed the bowl to Oliver before lifting Diggle's head. Oliver held the bowl to the man's lips, encouraging him to drink. Diggle coughed but obediently swallowed some of the mixture.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Yuck," Cisco said, wrinkling his nose. "I don't see how you can stomach that."<p>

"The herbs don't taste the best," Matthew admitted, "but we've learned to tolerate it. Without them we would have died several times."

Malcolm stared thoughtfully at Matthew. Was it possible that the herbs could be found elsewhere than on Lian Yu? He had to admit that the properties of the herbs might be useful should he ever have need of them.

Ra's, too, was contemplating the herbs. Perhaps he should send Nyssa and a few of his most trusted assassins to Lian Yu to secure a supply of the plant for his own purposes.

\* \* \*

><p><em> Matthew lowered Diggle's head back to the table and the brothers moved away to wait.<em>

\_Sometime later Diggle came to. He looked around in confusion, wondering where he was. After two tries, he finally managed to sit up, groaning as he held his injured shoulder. As his surroundings came back into focus, he saw -\_

\_Oliver and Matthew Queen watching him.\_

\_'Hey,' Matthew said as they stood and approached the table. Diggle's eyes widened as he saw they were wearing green and red leather jackets, with the hoods down, and he knew.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"So they let me in on their secret." Diggle shook his head in disbelief.<p>

"If you hadn't been shot and poisoned, they would have waited a little longer, but eventually brought you in regardless," Malcolm pointed out.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oliver? Matthew?' Diggle said, looking from one to the other. 'You're the vigilantes,' he said in disbelief as he staggered to his feet. The brothers just stood there, watching him.<em>

\_After a moment Diggle swung at Oliver, but he quickly stepped aside and Diggle stumbled past with a groan.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The bodyguard grimaced. "That was a stupid thing to do," he muttered.<p>

"Attacking the man who saved your life? Yeah, I'd say it was stupid," Tommy said sarcastically. Diggle gave the Merlyn heir a poisonous glare.

"Shut up, Tommy," Malcolm snapped, fixing his son with a cold stare.

Caitlin said, "You probably should have waited a little longer before you moved around, Mr. Diggle. There may still have been traces of curare lingering in your system."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Easy, Dig. You were poisoned,' Matthew said calmly.<em>

\_ 'Son of a bitch!' Diggle cursed, throwing his fist at Oliver again. This time, Matthew stepped in and pinned Diggle's arms gently but firmly behind his back for a second before releasing him. Diggle staggered back toward the table.\_

\_ 'I could have taken you anywhere, could have taken you home,' Oliver said, keeping his voice calm and reasonable. 'I brought you here.' \_

\_ 'You really did lose your mind on that island,' Diggle spat, holding his injured arm.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Calling us insane?" Matthew muttered, though Moira and Thea looked horrified at his choice of words. Felicity grimaced and Cisco's jaw dropped.<p>

Dr. Stein wondered just how shuttered the brothers were that hearing something like this apparently wouldn't faze them.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Found a couple things along the way,' Matthew corrected.<em>

\_ 'Like what, archery classes?' Diggle asked acidly.\_

\_ 'Clarity,' Matthew replied calmly. He stepped forward. 'Starling City - is dying. It is being poisoned, by a criminal elite who don't care who they hurt, as long as they maintain their wealth and power.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Joe snorted in derision. "Understatement much?" he said just loudly enough for everyone to hear. Oliver gave the cop a calm stare before turning his attention back to the screen.<p>

Malcolm had to resist the urge to sneer at both the Detective and the boy. Matthew was right, of course - criminals were poisoning the Glades - but they were not the people on the List that he and Oliver were determined to bring down, foolishly thinking it would cure the city's ills. Men like Hunt and Petel were part of the problem, true, but the real criminals in the Glades were the scum like the man who had killed Rebecca. Only by ridding Starling of the Glades in its entirety could the city be made safer. \_For Robbie, \_he thought. He glanced at the four year old, who was blinking as he woke. The day Robbie was born, he had vowed that the Undertaking wouldn't just be to have his revenge for Rebecca's death, but to ensure that Moira's only son would grow up in a city that was safe.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What are you gonna do, take 'em all down by your lonesome?' Diggle snapped.<em>

\_ Oliver shook his head. 'No. Now - I want you to join us.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Seriously?" Ronnie said incredulously as he turned to Oliver. "Couldn't you have been a little less Darth Vader-ish there?" Oliver pressed his lips together and glowered at Ronnie. Muffled snickers came from Barry, Cisco, Iris, and Felicity. Dr. Stein shook his head - the way the young man had said that <em>was <em>somewhat disturbing.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Diggle scoffed in disbelief. 'Special Forces out of Kandahar,' Oliver pressed. 'It's perfect. You're a fellow soldier.'<em>

\_ 'Oliver, you're not a soldier,' Diggle shot back, fury lacing his tone. 'You're a criminal. And a murderer. Both of you.' He turned his back on them and stumbled toward the stairs. Oliver sighed as they watched him go.\_

\_ 'Well, that went well,' Matthew muttered, raking a hand through his hair.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Diggle winced. "That was far too harsh."<p>

"You were in shock, Mr. Diggle," Malcolm reminded him. "You were just shot and found out that the men you were assigned to protect were actually the Starling City vigilantes."

"Not sure I would be so understanding in the same situation," Joe muttered. Matthew gave the older man a barbed glare, but Joe snapped, "Don't look at me like that, Matthew. Even if you and Oliver are challenging Starling's corrupt, you're still breaking the law."

Oliver said bluntly, "Diggle, you told us not long ago not to take you for a fool, and yet you're acting like one here." Diggle flinched as he realized that Oliver was right; he had been a complete fool in that scene and shown an appalling lack of gratitude toward them for saving his life.

"There's something else, Mr. Diggle," Dusan said calmly. "While Oliver and Matthew may not wear uniforms, they are soldiers - fighting a war for Starling's soul." The albino leaned forward and pinned the bodyguard with a steady gaze. "The corrupt in Starling are destroying everything that people like Detective Lance are trying to uphold - the law and justice - just like Carmine Falcone and the Mob have undone everything that Thomas and Martha Wayne accomplished in Gotham." Dusan glanced briefly at the brothers before turning back to Diggle. "As long as people in Starling still have hope, the darkness can be held at bay. If all hope is lost, then what would become of the city?"

"Dusan is right," Arthur Curry added as the recording froze. "Without the actions of men like Oliver and Matthew - and later certain others in Bludhaven and Gotham - the darkness would have won in those cities long ago."

"What do you mean - others in Gotham?" Walter interjected. "Is there a vigilante operating in Gotham now?" Quentin Lance scowled at Curry, while Joe looked mildly displeased and Eddie blinked in surprise.

"Not at this point ... but soon," Clark Kent replied. Quentin started to speak, but the Kryptonian silenced him with a raised hand. "Later. We have one more recording still after this one, so please, hold your questions."

The Detective glowered at Kent, but returned his attention grudgingly to the screen as the recording continued. The others were just as surprised and, in some cases, suspicious, but knew they would get nothing more from their hosts for the time being.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A little later the brothers entered the mansion and went through the foyer to the stairs. They were halfway up when a voice stopped them short. 'Where were you?' They turned as Laurel emerged from the shadows to stand at the foot of the stairs.<em>

\_'What?' Oliver sighed. 'What are you doing here?'

\_'I heard about the shooting, and I wanted to make sure you were OK.'\_

\_'You did?'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel's face fell; she wasn't sure why Oliver thought she wouldn't care about him. Even if her current behavior was to the contrary, she couldn't deny all the years they had shared together.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Yeah. I knocked on the door, and I found a family terrified for you.' Oliver walked back down the steps and leaned his head against the post. "They had no idea where you were. At least Matthew had the sense to make sure they were safe and tell them he was going back out to look for you." Oliver glanced at his brother, who nodded, confirming that was the excuse he had given Moira. <em>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm glad you had the sense to make up an excuse, Matthew," Moira said dryly.<p>

Cisco snickered. "And it's not an entirely lame one either."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oh,' Oliver said simply. He had been so caught up in the moment that he had honestly forgotten about calling them so they knew he was all right.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"If I knew your secret, I would tell you to let us know what you're doing so everyone wouldn't be worried sick about you," Laurel told Oliver. He nodded in reply.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'If you'll excuse me, Laurel, it's been a long night, so I'm going to bed,' Matthew said quietly. 'By the way, give your father my gratitude for saving Walter's life tonight.'<em>

\_'Of course,' Laurel said with a gentle smile. She knew that despite his issues with Oliver, her father still had a soft spot for Matthew and would appreciate the thanks more if it came from him rather than Oliver, Moira, or even Thea.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Talia glanced at the Detective and saw the soft look in his eyes. She turned away to hide a smile and arched an eyebrow at Dusan, silently asking if he had seen the same thing she had. The albino snickered under his breath as he nodded. Nyssa observed the silent exchange between her younger siblings with interest.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew nodded and resumed his walk up the stairs. Once he was out of sight, Laurel demanded, 'Oliver, are you so self-centered that you don't think that people who care about you are gonna wonder where you are after you all got shot at?'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Burn," Felicity and Cisco said simultaneously.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver pushed away from the post and strode to her. 'You're right.'<em>

\_ 'I made peace with your selfishness a long time ago, but Moira, Thea, Robbie, and Walter, they don't deserve that. They deserve better, someone who doesn't care only about himself,' she said harshly.\_

\_She started to leave, but Oliver stopped her. 'Laurel, thank you for coming.'\_

\_ 'I care about the lives of other people, Oliver. Maybe you should try it sometime,' she said flatly before opening the front door to leave.\_

\_Oliver threw his head back and sighed. 'Oh, man.'\_

\_ 'That was harsh,' Thea said as she came up to him. 'You OK? '\_

\_ 'Sure,' he replied. 'Second time tonight that a friend of mine has taken me to the woodshed. Kind of tires you out.'\_

\_ 'Yeah,' she said softly. \_

\_ 'Good night,' he told her.\_

\_ 'Good night,' she replied, touching his shoulder briefly before he pulled away and went upstairs.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Harsh, Laurel," Tommy remarked.<p>

"But necessary," her father growled.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea<strong>\_

\_Back in the cave, Oliver pulled a picture of Laurel out of his shirt and stared at it pensively. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel turned to Oliver with a shocked look on her face. "You still have it?"<p>



"Yeah," he said quietly.

"I'm surprised," Quentin said in a tone that was almost a sneer. "Laurel told me she had given it to you, but I honestly expected it to be forgotten by now after the stunt you pulled with Sara." Sara winced and Nyssa shot the man a cold glare - she didn't appreciate the tone her beloved's father was using toward Taer-al-Safer and Oliver Queen.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Just then Yao Fei entered, carrying a bamboo cage with a bird in it. He set the cage down; both brothers leaned forward to look at the bird curiously. He said something in Mandarin.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh, what did he just say?" Thea asked in confusion.<p>

"Shengcun. It means 'survive'," Matthew said with a sigh. He glanced at Oliver, who looked grim. They both knew what was coming and could only hope that the others wouldn't be too revolted by it.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What are we supposed to do with that?' Matthew asked, his brow wrinkling in confusion. Yao Fei only repeated whatever he had just said as he knelt beside the cage.<em>

\_ 'Does that mean 'bird'?' Oliver asked. The man repeated himself a third time, more sharply.\_

\_ 'We don't speak Chinese!' Matthew yelled in frustration. Yao Fei looked at them for a moment before he rose and left the cave.\_

\_ Oliver returned his attention to the photo, whispering, 'I'm sorry, Laurel. I'm so sorry.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver kept his expression shuttered and did not look at his former lover. Laurel, on the other hand, was conflicted and unsure what to think.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_ Oliver bolted up in bed, gasping as the memories faded. Knowing it would be useless to try to sleep, he pulled his robe on and went downstairs, thinking to watch some TV.\_

\_ He was surprised to hear the TV on in the sitting room; he went in and saw Thea sitting on the couch with her robe over her PJs. She had a bowl of chips in her lap.\_

\_ A news reporter was speaking. 'There were no signs of forced entry

or any evidence of a struggle, but, hours later, the police found that the bloodstained kitchen knife in the trunk -'\_

\_'Couldn't sleep, either?' Thea asked as Oliver sat beside her.\_\_

\_'No.' He laid his arm across the back of the couch.\_\_

\_'The reporter continued, 'Forensics analysis verified -'\_

\_'What are you watching?' he asked.\_\_

\_'Peter Declan,' Thea replied.\_\_

\_' - blood on the blade -'\_

\_'Hmm? '\_\_

\_' - Peter Declan's fingerprints -'\_

\_'The guy who killed his wife,' Thea said. He shook his head in confusion.\_\_

\_'Despite the growing list of evidence -'\_

\_'Right. This guy killed his wife in their baby's room. Psycho,' Thea clarified.\_\_

\_'Video footage of Declan's prison interview four years before played. 'Camille was everything to me. I couldn't kill her any more than I could kill myself.'\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"He's telling the truth," Henry Allen said quietly. Everyone turned to him. "I can hear it in his voice. He didn't kill his wife."<p>

"How can you possibly know that?" Laurel asked skeptically. Henry turned to the attorney, his voice even, but the pain in his eyes clear to see.

"Because Declan's case bears several similarities to that of my wife." Laurel looked stricken. Iris gripped Barry's hand tightly, trying to comfort him even as tears trickled down her cheeks. Barry was grim faced as he stared at his father.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea turned the TV off. 'So why can't you sleep?'<em>

\_'Bad dreams.'\_\_

\_'About?' Thea prodded.\_\_

\_'Laurel.'\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin groaned. "Not again." Sara had to restrain a snicker as

Laurel's face flamed. Iris nudged Barry in the ribs, a smirk on her lips as she glanced at the Detective. Barry ducked his head lest Quentin see the amusement he felt.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'So why don't you make a play?' Thea asked. 'I mean, she did come over here just to make sure you didn't get shot.'<em>

\_'There are reasons.'\_

\_'Mm, what are they? Besides you sleeping with her sister and her sister dying and her father hating your guts and you basically being a jerk to everybody since you've been back?' she mused.\_

\_'Those are the top ones,' he told her. Thea smiled at that. He took a deep breath. 'I know that it might not seem like it sometimes, but -' he sighed ' - I'm not the same person I used to be.'\_

\_'So show her. Be yourself. I mean your new self.' Oliver looked at her thoughtfully.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Giving your brother advice regarding my daughter, Thea?" Detective Lance said dryly. "I'm surprised." She gave him a flat stare.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning Matthew entered the sitting room to find his mother and another man already there. 'How did you sleep?' Moira asked, not looking up from the newspaper she was reading.<em>

\_'Just fine, thank you,' he replied, eyeing the stranger. 'We have a visitor.'\_

\_'Mr. Diggle's replacement,' Moira remarked as she turned a page.\_

\_'Replacement?' Matthew queried, his mind racing.\_

\_'Yes. He tendered his resignation this morning,' she said as she lowered the paper and pinned her younger son with a hard stare.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew gave his twin a cross glare as she tried - rather poorly - to stifle her laugh. Malcolm smirked.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Did he say why?'<em>

\_'He said he didn't approve of the way you and Oliver spend your evenings, particularly given that they always begin with you ditching him.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Snorts of disbelief could be heard from the three cops, who all glanced at Diggle. The bodyguard shrugged. "Obviously I wasn't willing to rat them out."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew walked up to the new bodyguard. 'Hi.'<em>

\_'Mr. Queen, Rob Scott,' the man said as they shook hands. 'I'll be your new body man.'\_

\_'That's a firm grip you got there, Rob,' Matthew remarked, faking a wince.\_

\_'That's five years SWAT with Monument Point M.C.U.,' Rob told him.\_

\_Matthew arched an eyebrow. 'I feel safer already,' he deadpanned.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea started to laugh. "Poor Rob," she gasped. "He has no idea what he's getting into."<p>

Moira shook her head in disapproval, though inwardly she agreed with her daughter. Laurel and Tommy grinned in amusement.

Matthew, however, was studying Rob Scott intently. "I have no doubt he's a good man and a dedicated bodyguard, but he's not a man I would want at my back."

"Hold on," Eddie objected. "I have a friend in Monument Point SWAT. They're all men who can be trusted."

"Perhaps," Matthew allowed. "But I'm not too keen on him."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Ah, thank God we don't have to hear about this awful man anymore,' Moira interrupted. Matthew glanced at the TV, where the headline read: <strong>'Declan Set for Execution.' <strong>He grabbed the remote and turned up the volume.\_

\_'Declan's execution is set for midnight two days from now,' the reporter said. 'Camille Declan's former employer, Jason Brodeur, released a statement saying, quote, 'I hope this gives Camille the peace she deserves'.\_

\_'Jason Brodeur?' Matthew muttered.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm suppressed a scowl. He had long suspected that Jason Brodeur was behind Camille Declan's death, and as the case had been similar to Rebecca's, he had followed it with interest.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'What?' his mother asked.<em>

\_'The dead wife worked for Jason Brodeur.'\_

\_He did not see the brief flicker of panic in her eyes. 'Apparently so. What - why?' she asked suspiciously. Oliver entered the sitting room then.\_

\_'No reason,' Matthew brushed it off as he turned off the TV. 'Say, Rob,' he added, turning to the bodyguard, 'Oliver and I want to go into town. Could you please get the car for us?'

\_'No offense, Mr. Queen, but I have been filled in on your tendency to slip the leash,' Rob said mildly. 'If it's all the same to you, I'd prefer keeping you in my sights at all times.'\_

\_Matthew gave him an amused smile. 'We're twenty miles from the city. If you don't drive us, how else are we gonna get there?' He paused for a second. 'Right?'

\_Rob nodded and left. 'I like him,' Matthew proclaimed, dropping the remote on the table. Moira eyed him closely. As he strode past Oliver, who had heard enough of the conversation to realize what was going on, the teen arched an eyebrow, an amused smile curling his lips. Oliver grinned and clapped Matthew on the shoulder as they went into the foyer.\_

\* \* \*

><p>All the younger adults laughed. "This is going to be fun," Thea drawled.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Outside the mansion, Rob was standing by the car when two motorcycles roared past him. The helmeted riders waved. Rob waved back before realizing, too late, who they were. 'Hey!' he shouted in vain as they roared down the drive.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Moira shook her head as the younger adults laughed again.<p>

"Got to be a record," Tommy smirked.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the Foundry the brothers researched the Declan case on the computers. <em>\_'They say Peter Declan murdered his wife in cold blood. \_\_He had no alibi, and all the evidence \_\_pointed toward him. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death, an open-and-\_\_shut case, except for one thing.' Matthew opened the notebook and flipped through it until \_\_he found what he was looking for - Jason Brodeur's \_\_name. 'Declan's wife Camille worked for Jason Brodeur. And Jason Brodeur is on the List.'\_

\_At an unknown location, a man was reading a newspaper account regarding Declan's \_\_upcoming execution when his boss arrived. 'Mr. Brodeur,' he said \_\_respectfully as he stood.\_

\_'Admiring your handiwork?' Brodeur asked with a slight smile.\_

\_'You should have just let me kill both of 'em,' the man grumbled.\_

\_'Peter Declan is worth more alive,' Brodeur made clear. ' 'Husband kills wife' is a much \_\_better headline than 'whistle-blower uncovers toxic dumping,' don't you think? \_\_Either way, forty-eight hours, all this'll be over.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Bastard," Matthew growled. "How would you feel if someone killed your wife and then framed you for it? Oh, I forgot," he spat acidly. "you wouldn't feel anything, because you would rather walk over people like the Declans."<p>

Several eyebrows rose in surprise at the younger Queen brother's harsh words.

"Easy, Matt," Oliver said quietly.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the Foundry, Matthew forged new arrows as Oliver sat at the computer. <em>\_'The odds are good that Brodeur is involved in this woman's murder, which means \_\_an innocent man is facing execution,' Matthew said loudly enough to be heard over the whir of the machine.\_

\_ Oliver pulled out the photo \_\_of Laurel. 'He'll need a good attorney.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin sighed in resignation but wisely said nothing. Iris chuckled and the cop glared at her, but she only shrugged. "Why stew over it, Detective? Oliver's bound to keep asking for Laurel's help as the Emerald Archer, and there's not much you can do about it."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Night was falling outside CNRI, but inside the building Laurel was just preparing to leave. <em>\_'So I take it there's absolutely no point in asking if you'd like to grab a drink?' Joanna \_\_asked as she walked past.\_

\_'I can't. I have to go over transcripts for the \_\_Fernands case,' Laurel replied distractedly. She shrugged her jacket on and picked up her bag.\_

\_'You know, if you go somewhere that's not work or your home, your odds of \_\_meeting someone increase by, like, a gazillion percent.'\_

\_'Oh, that's not true. I could still get mugged on the way home.'\_

\_ 'In that case, I hope he's cute and single,' Joanna jibed.\_

\_ 'Good night, Joanna,' was all Laurel said, though she could not hide a smile.\_

\_ A short time later Laurel unlocked her apartment door and entered, flipping the light switch. Nothing happened - the apartment remained dark, Uneasy now, Laurel tried the lights again before going to her desk and opening the drawer where her handgun was concealed, checking that it was loaded. A sound behind her \_\_- and she whirled, aiming the gun at the Scarlet Archer.\_

\* \* \*

><p>'Whoa," Ronnie muttered. Cisco and Felicity looked startled.<p>

Matthew tilted his head as he asked, "Would you really have shot me, Laurel?"

"Had I known it was you under the hood, no," she replied.

\* \* \*

><p><em>He subtly activated the voice changer he held concealed in his hand. '<em>\_Hello, Laurel.'\_

\_ She kept the gun steady as he started toward her. 'Don't move! '\_

\_ 'I'm not gonna hurt you,' he told her, lowering his bow to his side. \_

\_ 'Stay back,' she demanded. 'My father's a cop. You are making a huge \_\_mistake.' \_

\_ 'We're not the men you think we are, and we need your help,' he replied. 'Peter \_\_Declan is gonna be executed in forty-eight hours. We think he's innocent.' Laurel did not lower the gun. ' \_\_Declan's wife was gonna blow the whistle on Jason Brodeur. Brodeur had her \_\_murdered.' \_

\_ 'There are a thousand lawyers in Starling City,' she shot back. 'Why me?' \_\_Matthew gently reached out and pushed the barrel of the gun down; Laurel \_\_didn't resist.\_

\_ 'We're both trying to help,' he said as he circled behind her.\_

\_ 'What makes you sure I'm gonna help you?' she scoffed. \_

\_ His voice was close to her ear. 'Because I know you'd do anything to save the life of an innocent man.' She stood frozen for a moment, but by the time she roused herself, the archer was gone.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Nyssa leaned forward and said quietly, "Your devotion to justice is commendable, Miss Lance, but you let the letter of the law hold

yourself back. Had Matthew not come to you, this man would be dead now for a crime he didn't commit. Consider that." Laurel looked thoughtful.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following day Laurel met with Declan at Iron Heights Penitentiary. He held a photo of his young daughter in his hands as Laurel talked.<em>

\_ 'A jury has charged you as guilty, Mr. Declan.' \_

\_ 'The evidence was stacked against me, but I didn't kill my wife,' he replied. He leaned across the table, the photo still in his hands. 'I didn't take my daughter's mother from her.' \_

\_ After a moment of silence Laurel spoke. 'The murder weapon was a knife from your kitchen with your prints on it. It was found, along with Camille's blood, in the trunk of your car. Your neighbors said they heard an argument that night.' Declan shook his head as he stood and paced toward the window.\_

\_ 'We had a knockdown fight over Jason Brodeur,' he finally said, turning back to Laurel. His voice was ragged. 'Camille worked for him, and his company had been dumping toxic waste into the Glades. Now, Camille told me that she'd gone and told a supervisor about it. I was afraid for my family's safety. And we argued very loudly, yes. Izzy started crying, so Camille went and stayed in her room.' He sighed and sat back down. 'In the morning, I went to apologize, and that's when I found her.' Laurel leaned forward. 'So I just grabbed Izzy, and I ran outside, and I called 911. I'm innocent, Miss Lance,' he finished pleadingly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Poor guy," Tommy muttered. Barry closed his eyes as he recalled the night of his mother's murder.<p>

"The night Nora died," Henry said quietly, "I tried to fight off the intruder who entered our home, but couldn't before he stabbed her. After he was gone, I stayed by her side and tried to save her life. When the police came they found me holding her body." Malcolm closed his eyes as he recalled the voicemail he had received from Rebecca the night she died - the one he had ignored. He could sympathize with Henry and understood his desire to hunt down the man responsible for Nora Allen's death, as he had done the same thing after Rebecca died.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Queen Consolidated Walter was working in the CEO's office when Moira entered. 'Well, it looks like someone forgot a lunch date with his wife,' she said lightly.<em>

\_ 'What do you mean?' he asked as he looked up from his work. 'Lunch isn't for another -' he looked at his watch and paused abruptly. Moira only smiled. 'I'm so sorry,' he apologized as he took off his glasses.\_

\_ 'It's all right,' she reassured him. 'The restaurant is holding our



table. Is there something wrong?'

'Compliance department has tagged something - 2.6 million withdrawal from one of our Vancouver subsidiaries,' he said. She froze momentarily, but quickly shook it off.

'What - you mean - are you saying that someone embezzled 2.6 million from the company?' she stammered.

'Well, it's probably a bookkeeping error, but Compliance is understandably worried about an IRS audit.'

'Hmm.' He walked past her to retrieve his jacket and so did not see the brief flicker of fear in her eyes.

'But don't worry. I'm sure it's nothing,' he continued as she composed herself and turned to him. 'Come on. We're gonna be late. I mean, later.' Moira smiled and took his arm, the two heading out of the office.

\* \* \*

><p>"What did you do, Mom?" Thea asked in a dangerously low voice. "Embezzling 2.6 million from QC?" Moira sighed but said nothing. Walter and Malcolm both eyed her with suspicion. <em>What did you do, indeed, Moira? <em>Malcolm wondered.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Laurel stared at the bulletin board above her father's desk at the SCPD as he entered with a file in hand. 'Well, I wasn't the lead on this, but from what I recall, we had fingerprints. We had blood. We got motive, everything.' Laurel turned and sat down beside him, peering at the file.<em>

'Brodeur seems like the type of guy with resources needed to frame someone.'

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, he does," Malcolm said darkly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Laurel, in twenty-four hours, Peter Declan is lying down with a needle in his arm, and he's not getting up,' her father reminded her. 'If I thought for a second we didn't have the right guy, do you think there's anything else I'd be doing right now except trying to get at what really happened?'<em>

'Declan said his wife went to her supervisor with allegations that Brodeur was dumping toxic waste,' she said, looking at him for his reaction.

'Yeah, but that supervisor, he said that never happened.' He took the file back and flipped through it. 'Let me see. What was his name? Here you go,' he said, pointing it out. 'Istook, Matt Istook. He said he didn't even see Camille that day. Happy now?' he asked sarcastically.

\_Laurel sighed, but gave him a smile. 'Yes.' She rose to leave, but he stopped her before she reached the door.\_

\_'You know, I thought it'd be a cold day in hell before you started defending criminals.'\_

\_'I'm not so sure Declan's a criminal,' she shot back. 'Like you said, he's on a clock. Can't leave any stone unturned.'\_

\_'Oh, yeah,' Quentin muttered.\_

\_At Big Belly Burger Carly brought Diggle his order, but did not immediately leave.\_

\_'So when are you gonna tell me?' she asked.\_

\_'Hmm?'\_

\_'About what happened to your arm,' she pointed out.\_

\_'Oh, it's my shoulder, and it's - its fine.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Barry arched an eyebrow at Diggle. "Now who's lying - again?" Diggle grumbled something under his breath.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I knew those Queen guys were trouble,' she said flatly.<em>

\_'Hey, I never said this happened protecting them,' Diggle defended.\_

\_Carly looked over at the door as it opened. 'Oh, yeah? Then what's he doing here?'\_

\_Diggle looked around in surprise as Matthew and Rob entered. 'Area is secure, sir,' Rob said.\_

\_'Thank you very much, Rob,' Matthew replied. He strode into the main area, directly to Diggle's booth. Carly watched his approach with an unimpressed look on her face.\_

\_'Hello, Diggle's sister-in-law Carly,' he said as he extended his hand. 'I'm Matthew Queen.'\_

\_'I know who you are,' she replied as she shook his hand briefly before crossing her arms.\_

\_'No, you really don't,' Matthew replied. Carly stared at him for a second before walking off.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The group sobered quickly with the realization of how right Carly was. The majority of them didn't know the real Oliver and Matthew Queen, not the ones sitting with them now.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Hello,' Matthew said as he slid into the booth opposite Diggle. 'Oliver and I couldn't help but notice a distinct lack of police cars when we got home. We knew you wouldn't drop a dime on us.' Diggle gazed levelly at him. 'So have you considered our offer?'<em>

\_Diggle scoffed. 'Offer? That's one hell of a way to put it.'\_

\_'It is an offer,' Matthew said calmly. 'It's a chance to do the kind of good that compelled you to join the military.'\_

\_'Please,' Diggle scoffed. 'You were born with a platinum spoon in your mouth, Queen. What, you spent five years on an island with no room service, and suddenly you found religion?'\_

\_Matthew reached into his pocket and pulled out the notebook, holding it up for Diggle to see, before setting it on the table. 'This was my father's. Oliver and I found it when we buried him.' Diggle flipped through the book before Matthew took it back.\_

\_'I thought you said your father died when the boat went down.'\_

\_'All three of us made it to a life raft, but there wasn't enough food and water for everyone, so he shot himself in the head.'\_

\_Diggle leaned back in surprise. 'My God -'\_

\_'And as much as he was doing it to give us a chance to survive, we believe that he was also atoning for his sins,' Matthew continued. 'We need to right the wrongs done by our family, and we're offering you the chance to right the wrongs done to yours.'\_

\_'Matthew, what are you talking about?'\_

\_'The police never caught your brother's shooter,' he revealed.\_

\_'Hey, you leave Andy out of this,' Diggle said angrily, pointing a finger in the teen's face.\_

\_'The bullets were laced with curare,' Matthew said quietly. 'That's Floyd Lawton's M.O. He is the sniper that Oliver stopped.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Emotional blackmail was all Ra's and Malcolm saw; the brothers had found a way to make Diggle obligated to their cause. It was something the Demon's Head and his former Horseman could both appreciate. Malcolm knew the tactic would probably work, if Diggle's expression was any indication. There was a sense of relief there ... something Malcolm was certain he would feel once he destroyed the Glades.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Are you trying to tell me that Oliver took down Andy's

killer?' Diggle asked in disbelief.<em>

\_'We're giving you the chance, a chance to help other people's families. Do you remember when the people in this city helped each other?' Matthew's voice hardened. 'They can't do that anymore, because a group of people - people like my father - they see nothing wrong with raising themselves up by stepping on other people's throats. It does need to stop, and if it's not gonna be the courts and it's not gonna be the cops, then it's gonna be me and Oliver.' He leaned forward intently. 'And, we hope, you.' He put the notebook back in his pocket.\_

\* \* \*

><p>His words struck a chord with the rest of the viewing party, albeit a different one for each person.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>He slid out of the booth and Rob immediately came up. Matthew waved him off. 'I'm gonna go to the washroom, Rob.' He walked off, leaving Rob and Diggle behind. They exchanged uncertain glances. Finally Diggle said, 'Oh, that boy's long gone, man.' Rob looked at Diggle, then back toward the bathroom, irritation creeping across his features.<em>

\_At the mansion, Walter had his laptop before him on the sitting room table. 'You still following the money trail?' Moira asked as she entered.\_

\_ 'Mm-hmm.' \_

\_ 'Don't we have accountants for that sort of thing?' she pointed out.\_

\_ 'They're being singularly ineffective in this instance,' he muttered.\_

\_ 'Well, then it's fortunate that I've solved the mystery,' she said as she poured a drink. That brought Walter's head up as she sat opposite him. 'I think I'm the culprit. \$2.6 million is a rather specific figure. That's the exact amount the company invested in a friend's start-up venture three years ago.' She chuckled. 'I will call accounting. They'll clean it all up, then there's nothing to worry about.' She left the room, but Walter's concern only deepened.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm glanced at Moira again. His suspicions were getting stronger and stronger by the minute.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At CNRI Laurel and Joanna were browsing through files. 'You really are putting a lot of hours into this Declan thing. You actually think he's innocent,' Joanna remarked.<em>

\_ 'Someone does,' Laurel replied without looking up.\_

\_ 'So you said, but you didn't say who.' \_

\_ Laurel glanced around warily before sidling up to her friend and saying in a low voice, 'The guardian angels.' \_

\_ Joanna gasped. 'The guys in the hoods? Look, you're - you're kidding.' \_

\_ 'They tracked me down and asked me to look into the Declan case.' \_

\_ 'But you've met them?' Joanna interrupted. \_

\_ 'But they go against everything that I was ever taught to believe in. They break the law and God knows what else.' \_

\_ 'How are you not afraid that they are gonna do God knows what to you?' Joanna asked, concerned. \_

\_ 'They won't. I don't know. I can feel it.' \_

\_ 'You know, when I told you to meet someone, this is far, far away from what I meant.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara snorted in amusement. Laurel twisted in her seat to glare at her younger sister, but after a moment she shook her head and gave Sara a chagrined smile.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>That night Laurel met the vigilantes on a rooftop. 'I got your message. Is there a reason we can't do this face to face?' she asked without turning to face them.<em>

\_ 'You've met with Peter Declan,' the Scarlet Archer noted. \_

\_ 'You were right,' Laurel said, cautiously approaching them. 'He might be innocent. Declan said his wife blew the whistle on Brodeur the day she was murdered.' \_

\_ 'Then we need to get whoever she told about Brodeur to testify,' the Emerald Archer mused, pacing across the roof. \_

\_ 'He already has. Matt Istook, Camille's supervisor. Only, he says that she didn't say a word to him.' \_

\_ 'He could be lying,' the Scarlet Archer pointed out. \_

\_ 'Well, if he is, then he's very convincing. He had the jury and police believing him.' \_

\_ 'He hasn't been questioned by us,' the Emerald Archer said harshly. \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh, not sure I want to see another example of your questioning," Cisco mumbled. Oliver snorted.<p>

"Sorry to disappoint you, Cisco."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I didn't become a lawyer to break the law or hurt anybody,' she shot back.<em>

\_'We do what's necessary, what people like Peter Declan need,' the Scarlet Archer said.\_

\_'If what you're doing isn't wrong, then why are you hiding your faces with a hood?' Laurel asked.\_

\_'To protect the ones we care about.'\_

\_'That sounds lonely.'\_

\_There was a long pause. 'It can be,' the Emerald Archer finally said. 'But not today.' His companion wheeled and fired an arrow toward the building opposite. Seconds later they were gone, leaving Laurel alone on the roof.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Protecting those we care about is important to everyone involved with the Justice League," Clark Kent said, drawing the viewing party's attention to him. "If the entire world knew our secret identities, our families would become targets for leverage or reprisals by the rich and powerful who hate the League."<p>

"So none of you have ever revealed your identities?" Tommy asked.

"Only those aboard the Watchtower and close family/friends know who each one of us is. Of course, the villains we've faced have tried to expose our identities to the world, but none of them ever succeeded," Hal Jordan said. Oliver glanced at the superhero with a knowing half smile.

"I assume these Justice League members include me and Matthew, correct?" Hal gave him a flat look and Oliver snorted. "Come on, Jordan. You said before we started that these recordings would show the men we became today. It's not too much of an assumption to conclude that we are associated with the Justice League somehow."

After a moment Hal nodded. "You're right, Oliver. Your future self - and Matthew's - are aboard the Watchtower at present. Once today's viewings are over, you will all have a chance to talk to them."

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Queen Consolidated, Felicity exited the elevator and stormed with purpose into the CEO's office. 'I've got one question. Why am I being fired?' she said without preamble.<em>

\_Walter looked up from the folder he was reading. 'Miss Smoak, isn't it?'\_

\_'Yes. And I am without a doubt the single most valuable member of your technical division,' Felicity said hotly. 'That's including my so called supervisor. Letting me go would be a major error for this company.'\_

\_Walter closed the folder and dropped it to the desk. 'I agree, which is why you're not being fired.'\_

\_Caught off guard by his statement, Felicity stammered, 'Uh, I assumed when you brought me up here, it was because -' she made a slashing motion across her throat.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco, Ronnie, Roy, and Thea all laughed. Walter shook his head, a small smile of amusement on his face. "I would never fire you, Miss Smoak, unless you put in a dissatisfactory performance at your job for whatever reason, or -" he lifted a hand as Felicity was about to thank him "- you do anything that would besmirch the reputation of the company or my family."<p>

"Yes, Mr. Steele," Felicity said quietly. "Thank you."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'It's because I wanted you to look into something for me,' Walter interjected calmly. Felicity looked at him askance, unsure what he meant. 'A variance of 2.6 million on a failed investment from three years ago.' He handed her the folder. 'It was authorized by my wife. I was hoping you could find out some of the details of the transaction for me.'<em>

\_'Find out -'\_'

\_'Dig up, discreetly,' he emphasized.\_

\_She smiled and closed the folder. 'I'm your girl.' She started to leave, only to turn back. 'I mean, I'm not your girl. I wasn't making a pass at you. Thank you for not firing me.' She left the office as Walter watched with amusement.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Very smooth, Felicity," Matthew teased the hacker, who turned crimson in embarrassment.<p>

"Oh, shut up," she muttered, ducking her head.

Oliver and Thea were trying unsuccessfully to hide their laughter. Moira had a bemused smile on her face.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Elsewhere Matt Istook headed for his car, touching the button to deactivate the alarm. He dropped his briefcase into the back seat and was about to climb behind the wheel when something struck him in the back of the neck. 'Aah!' He reached up and pulled it free - a small dart. 'What the -' was all he got out before his legs weakened, his vision dimmed, and he fell to the ground beside the car.<em>

\_When he regained consciousness, he found himself lying on the hard ground. He groaned as he tried to sit up, only to discover that his hand had been handcuffed to a railroad tie.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, God," Cisco mumbled as he turned green. Joe and Eddie both glared at the brothers.<p>

"You're going to let him be run over by a train?" Ronnie demanded. This shook him more than the other means of intimidation they had seen so far. "That's cruel."

"No more than the other things they have done," Ra's rejoined calmly.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Matt Istook,' a voice growled.<em>

\_Terror filled Istook as he looked up to see the two hooded men standing before him. The whistle of the approaching train could be heard in the distance. 'You're them, the hood guys. You're the guys that've been terrorizing the city,' he gasped.\_

\_'Peter Declan, your lies helped put him on death row. Now, either it's time to tell us the truth, or it's time for the 10:15 to Bludhaven,' the red hooded archer snarled.\_

\_Istook began to stammer, panic clear on his face. 'O-OK. OK, I - Brodner paid me to - to say that Camille never spoke to me, but I didn't have anything to do with her death. Oh, God, please. I'll do anything. Y-you could have the file!'\_

\_'What file?' the Scarlet Archer demanded.\_

\_'Camille gave me a file of evidence against Jason Brodner.'\_

\_'Where is it?!'\_

\_'Let me go and I'll tell you!' Istook pleaded. The archers ignored his pleas and leaped clear of the tracks. Istook screamed in panic as the train bore down on him, closer and closer. 'Wait! Wait! Wait! Wait! Don't go! It's in my desk! The file, it's in my desk at the office! You can have it! Get me out of here!' An arrow whizzed out of the darkness and Istook, freed, barely managed to leap aside before the train thundered past.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin scowled at his daughter. "I gave you Istook's name and you turned it over to them?" he demanded.<p>

"What did you think was going to happen, Lance?" Oliver asked sarcastically.

\* \* \*



><p><em><strong>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China  
Sea<strong>\_

\_In the cave, the brothers watched as Yao Fei roasted meat over a fire. 'What is that?' Oliver asked. 'I'm so hungry. It smells really good.'\_

\_Matthew stood and inched forward, reaching out toward the fire. Yao Fei promptly twisted his hand in a hard grip that sent the boy to his knees. 'Aah! Hey, fine. Don't share.' He grunted as he rose and staggered back to his sleeping spot.\_

\_The man pointed to the caged bird and gestured with his hands - clearly meaning that they should snap its neck. He spoke in Mandarin.\_

\_Oliver shook his head. 'We're not gonna kill the bird.' Yao Fei only leveled a stare at them as he began to eat.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver sighed and looked away from the screen. He knew what the others would soon be seeing and while he knew it was necessary that it happen, a part of him still wished his mother and sister did not have to watch.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>\*\*

\_Laurel was busy at her CNRI desk when the lights abruptly went out. She immediately looked over her shoulder, then jumped slightly as a file landed on the desk. 'Compliments of Matt Istook,' Oliver told her from where he stood in the shadows across the room.\_

\_'What's in here?' Laurel asked as she rose.\_

\_'Leverage on Jason Brodner, enough to help save Peter Declan's life,' Oliver replied as she flipped through the file.\_

\_'As an attorney, I never would have gotten a file like this. I always thought the law was sacred, I - it fixed everything,' she admitted.\_

\_'And now, Laurel?' he probed. 'Now what do you think?'\_

\_'I think there are too many people in this city who only care about themselves - people who are selfish. I think they need someone who cares about the lives of other people - someone like you.' She looked back down at the file; Oliver watched her for a moment with a pensive look on his face. Seconds later the lights came back on, but he was gone.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel leaned back in her chair, studying the screen thoughtfully.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver and Matthew entered the mansion, both grinning like fools.<em>

\_'Oh, my God. What is wrong with your face?' Thea asked.\_

\_'What do you mean?' Oliver replied.\_

\_'There's something really weird on it, like this thing with your mouth. It - it looks like it's in the shape of a smile.'\_

\_'Both brothers laughed. 'That's cute,' Matthew said.\_

\_'So why are you grinning?' Thea asked.\_

\_'I took your advice with Laurel to be myself,' Oliver said. \_

\_'And -'\_

\_'It's helping.'\_

\_'Got mad relationship skills, bro,' she smirked. 'Let me know if you need trendy places to propose.' She started to walk off.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew snickered as he arched an eyebrow at his twin, who wasn't even trying to hide her own smile. Oliver shook his head in mingled amusement and exasperation at his sister's remark.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I think you're getting a little bit ahead of yourself,' Oliver said lightly, holding two fingers a bare width apart.<em>

\_'Mm. Little bit.'\_

\_'At that moment the front door opened and Rob stumbled into the foyer, winded.\_

\_'Rob,' Matthew said with amusement. 'You gotta keep up.' They headed upstairs, leaving the weary bodyguard behind.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Both brothers snickered at the screen. Moira rolled her eyes and made a swatting motion in Matthew's direction. His smug grim only widened. "Honestly, Mom, I don't know what you were thinking, hiring him to replace Diggle."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning Laurel was typing away at her computer as her father entered CNRI. 'Hey, you look busy. Is that the Declan case? You know, it was a funny development on Matt Istook. He, uh, filed a police report. He said the Hoods harassed him last night. And that's funny, because I gave my daughter Istook's name.'<em>

\_'Laurel's jaw dropped. 'Dad -'\_

\_ 'They're vigilantes,' Lance hissed, leaning forward. 'They're a pair of damn criminals, and you working with them, that makes you an accessory! '\_

\_ 'I am trying to save an innocent man's life,' she shot back.\_

\_ 'No. You're breaking the law.' \_

\_ 'Well, I wouldn't have to if the police would have done their job right in the first place,' Laurel snapped. He looked shocked for a moment, but as quickly as it had come it disappeared.\_

\_ 'I asked you how you got this case,' her father growled. 'You lied to me straight to my face, eh? I thought you and I didn't do that. Guess I was wrong.' He stormed off, leaving a shaken Laurel standing alone.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin glowered at his older daughter. "I never thought I'd see the day," he said tightly. Laurel had the grace to look mildly ashamed; she knew he was right and the words his onscreen self had spoken had stung.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later that day, Laurel argued with Judge Moss. 'The mere existence of the file proves that Mr. Istook perjured himself for Jason Brodeur's benefit.'<em>

\_ 'That's slander.' Laurel's head whipped around as a man entered the room with three others, including Jason Brodeur, behind him. 'Jared Swanstrom, Your Honor,' the man who had spoken said. 'I represent Jason Brodeur and Brodeur Chemical.' \_

\_ Laurel stared evenly at Moss. 'The interest of justice requires you to stay the defendant's execution pending exploration of the newly discovered evidence.' \_

\_ Moss sighed irritably. 'Ours isn't a court of justice, Miss Lance,' she said with finality. 'It's a court of law, and under the law, I don't think your evidence is sufficient to warrant a stay of execution. Your motion for habeas corpus is denied.' Laurel's lips tightened.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel was shocked at the way Moss had casually dismissed her arguments. <em>Not a court of justice? <em>she seethed inwardly. \_Has Moss lost her mind? \_In that moment she started to see just why Oliver and Matthew were doing what they were. \_Perhaps they've chosen the right path, even if their methods are brutal.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em> She turned to leave - but stopped before Brodeur, her voice a harsh whisper. <em>

\_ 'This isn't over. I've got the loose end now, and no matter what

happens, I am going to pull on it until your whole world unravels.'\_\_

\_Back in his office a few hours later, Brodeur was fuming. 'Declan's lawyer's pulling me into this! I'm gonna go to prison, if not for murder, then this - this dumping thing.'\_\_

\_'That won't happen,' his bodyguard said calmly. 'There are steps we can take.'\_\_

\_'You saw her,' Brodeur snapped. 'She's going after me.' He sighed.\_\_

\_'She's gonna want to meet with her client after what happened in court today. We have friends up in Iron Heights. Prison can be a dangerous place.' Brodeur stared at him with dawning comprehension.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, crap," Laurel muttered, turning pale. "Brodeur's gonna arrange to have Declan murdered in prison! That can't happen."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>A defeated Laurel met with the Emerald Archer that night. 'We're not done yet,' he said with confident assurance.<em>

\_'I'm an attorney. Trust me. We're done,' Laurel said wearily.\_\_

\_'What do you need to free Peter Declan?'\_\_

\_'At this point, nothing short of a signed confession from Brodeur.' The vigilante immediately turned to leave. 'Where are you going?' Laurel called after him.\_\_

\_'To get a confession,' he replied darkly.\_\_

\_At Queen Consolidated Felicity was briefing Walter on what she had discovered. 'The company Mrs. Queen - or Steele. Mrs. Queen-Steele. Does she hyphenate? She seems like a woman who would hyphenate.' Walter cleared his throat as he sat down.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver snorted back laughter as he eyed Felicity, who had once again turned red. Moira shook her head, the bemused smile returning to her face.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Right,' Felicity muttered. 'The company she invested in doesn't exist.'<em>

\_'I don't understand,' Walter replied.\_\_

\_'There was no investment. The money was used to set up an offshore LLC called Tempest.'\_\_

\_ 'I don't recall that name being under the Queen Consolidated banner,' he mused.\_

\_ 'Cause it's not. There's nothing registered with the Secretary of State, no federal tax records, no patent applications filed. But in 2009, Tempest purchased a warehouse in Starling City.' Walter extended his hand for the file and she gave it to him. He opened it and began to read as she left. When he had finished he picked up his phone and dialed Matthew's number. The teenager answered after only a minute.\_

\_ 'Matthew Queen.' \_

\_ 'Matt, it's Walter. I've discovered something in the QC files that may be important. Will you join me at the office?' \_

\_ Matthew looked over at Oliver as they descended the stairs into the Lair. Oliver nodded, his expression saying, \*\*I'll handle Brodeur alone.\*\* \_

\_ 'I'll be there as soon as I can,' the boy told his stepfather before hanging up. 'I'm sorry, Ollie, but Walter sounded serious.' \_

\_ 'It's all right. Go with him.' \_

\_ 'Watch your step with Brodeur,' Matthew warned as he quickly changed from the leathers he had donned before Oliver's return back into his regular clothes and grabbed his jacket before sprinting up the stairs. Oliver watched his brother depart before turning his mind by to the mission at hand.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra shifted uneasily, prompting everyone to look at her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>In the Big Belly Burger, Carly went to Diggle's table and sat across from him. 'Enough moping. You quit. It's done. My advice would be to move on.'<em>

\_ 'Well, if it were only that easy.' \_

\_ 'Except it is. Personal security is dangerous. Your nephew already lost his father. He can't lose his uncle too.' They were silent for a moment.\_

\_ Finally Diggle said, 'Does it ever bother you that they never caught the guy who killed Andy?' He rubbed his chin. 'You know, when I was in Afghanistan, I had a job, and I did it. And when I could, I would help out the people there so that, in some small way, when I left, I could believe I left it a better place. But ever since I've been home, all I do is protect punks and spoiled one-percenters.' \_

\_ 'Yeah,' Carly said.\_

\_ 'I miss feeling like I'm making a difference in the world,' he sighed.\_

\_ 'Then get out of personal security and go do something you believe in,' she told him.\_

\_ 'Yeah, what if it's wrong? '\_

\_ 'John, if you believe in something, how can it be wrong? '\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Sounds like you're close to accepting Oliver and Matt's offer, Mr. Diggle," Tommy remarked.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Brodeur Chemical Oliver, in his disguise, and Jason Brodeur faced off. 'What do you want?' Brodeur asked as he stood against the wall, Oliver only inches away with an arrow aimed at him.<em>

\_ 'You're gonna confess that you arranged to have Peter Declan's wife murdered,' Oliver growled.\_

\_ 'What, so I can take his place in prison?' Brodeur scoffed.\_

\_ 'So you can avoid the death penalty.' \_

\_ 'Except if I'm dead, well, then, you've got no one to pin Camille's murder on. You need me to exonerate Peter Declan,' Brodeur said, his confidence returning. 'Maybe you could try to force me to sign a confession or something - '\_

\_ Oliver loosed the arrow into Brodeur's hand, pinning it to the wall. 'Yahh!' Brodeur screamed in pain. \_

\_ 'That might be difficult.' \_

\_ The ring of Brodeur's cell phone shattered the silence. 'My hand!' Brodeur groaned. Oliver pulled the phone out, flipped it open, and pressed the 'Send' button.\_

\_ 'Just answer it.' \_

\_ 'What?' Brodeur snapped into the phone.\_

\_ 'It's Ankov,' Brodeur's bodyguard replied. 'It's going down. One hour.' \_

\_ Oliver disconnected the call. 'What's going down in an hour? What?!' he demanded harshly.\_

\_ 'Let's just say Peter Declan's execution, it's getting moved up,' Brodeur said, then yelled as Oliver struck him in the jaw.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Joe shook his head. "I do hope you get to Iron Heights in time, Oliver. Jason Broduer is a scumbag."<p>

"I second that," Eddie added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Iron Heights Laurel was with Declan once again. 'We still have a shot. Do you remember the friend that I mentioned, the one who believes in you? He's working on something.' Declan shook his head.<em>

\_Outside Iron Heights Oliver dropped to the ground behind a guard, knocked him out, and quickly changed clothes.\_

\_In the meeting room Declan said, 'I told you, Jason Brodeur is powerful.'\_

\_Elsewhere in the prison a guard unlocked a door to admit Brodeur's bodyguard. 'Time to unlock the cages,' Ankov said sadistically.\_

\_ 'I've been here before. These lawyers holding out these little nuggets of hope,' Declan murmured.\_

\_An instant later the lights went out and an alarm began to blare. Laurel rose as the guard on duty dashed to the window.\_

\_ 'Secure all corners in cell block "C",' the order came.\_

\_The guard turned to Laurel and Declan. 'The warden's setting up a secure perimeter in "C" block. Stay here, Miss Lance.' He rushed out of the room. \_

\_ 'Wait!' Laurel called. She and Declan both rushed after the guard.\_

\_The hallway was chaos as guards and prisoners milled around. Laurel and Declan fled, deeper into the prison. In the block where they stopped, several prisoners were beating a guard unconscious.\_

\_ 'There's Lance,' one prisoner said, spotting them. He picked up the guard's gun and aimed it at her - only to be sent to the floor with an arrow in the shoulder. Laurel whirled to see the Emerald Archer, in a guard's uniform with a ski mask over his face.\_

\_ 'Let's go,' he urged. The three ran back down the hallway. Another prisoner tried to jump the Hood, but he beat the man off. As they continued down the hallway, cops with riot shields appeared at the far end. 'In here,' he said, leading them into another room.\_

\_Ankov was waiting. He punched Oliver, who crashed to the floor in a daze, before shoving Laurel into the chain link fence partitioning the room. Then he threw her back to the floor and wrapped his hands around her throat, choking her.\_

\_Oliver's eyes widened. He threw himself at Ankov, forcing the man to let go of Laurel. They rolled across the floor, but Oliver maneuvered himself on top and began to punch Ankov repeatedly in the face. Laurel staggered to her feet and rushed over, grabbing his arm. 'Stop!' she said hoarsely.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Jesus," Quentin muttered. He was somewhat shocked at the brutality Oliver had displayed, but at the same time he knew that if he had been in Oliver's place, he wouldn't have stopped. <em>Let the bastard rot behind bars, <em>he thought viciously, glowering at Ankov.

Sara glared at the screen and silently vowed that when they returned, she would ensure Ankov was put behind bars - or six feet in the ground, preferably - before he got anywhere near Laurel.

Tommy was glad that Oliver had been there to stop Ankov, and grateful that nothing worse had happened to Laurel. He shuddered at the thought of what could have happened to the woman he loved.

Barry knew that if it had been Iris, he would have done what Oliver did ... or tried to. Sure, the effort would've been futile, but he would've done it anyway.

Joe's thoughts were similar to Quentin's and Barry's. He was relieved that it had not been Iris, though he knew if it had been, Ankov would have found himself with a fight on his hands, for Iris was no wallflower; she likely would have kneed the bastard between the legs.

Laurel was white as a sheet as she realized that if the inmates had caught her and Oliver hadn't been there, she could have been raped. \_I should start wearing pants to Iron Heights.\_

Thea was pale as she leaned against Oliver; he wrapped his arm around her. Felicity had a hand over her mouth. Cisco was horrified, not at Oliver's actions, but at Ankov's.

Nyssa, Talia, and Dusan knew that if any one of them had been there, Ankov's neck would have been snapped before anyone could even blink. The Heir to the Demon observed, \_Laurel Lance's self defense skills served her well against Max Fuller's men, but against hardened enforcers like Ankov, such training is useless. Perhaps I should offer to train her.\_

Caitlin barely managed to suppress a shudder. She had had to treat a few teenage girls who had been raped before, and every time she had found it hard to rein her emotions in until she was alone with Ronnie. Sensing her distress, Ronnie wrapped his arm around her and whispered, "It's all right, Cait." She leaned into his side.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The single word broke through Oliver's rage. He stood and faced her, breathing heavily. The guards entered a minute later, shouting. Laurel backed away from Oliver as Declan was hustled off and Ankov taken into custody. A second later he slipped out without being noticed.<em>

\_Later, guards and police swarmed through and around Iron Heights, shouting orders as ambulances and police cars waited outside. Laurel was waiting in front of a police cruiser when her father arrived.\_

\_'Laurel,' he sighed as she threw her arms around him. 'Sweetie. What are you -'\_



\_'I'm all right,' she interrupted shakily.\_

\_'You sure?' he asked in concern.\_

\_'I'm sorry about what I said to you.' Quentin sighed.\_

\_'Yeah, well, you were right,' he told her. 'Ankov just confessed to Camille Declan's murder. We got the wrong guy. Now, listen to me, Laurel. I'm right, too, about them. They're dangerous. They're outside the law.'\_

\_'I know,' she confessed, shocking him. 'He's a killer. He would have killed that man. I looked in his eyes â€” it was like he had no remorse.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"He saved your life, Laurel," Matthew said pointedly.<p>

"If I'd known it was him, Matthew," Laurel said wearily, "you can be sure I wouldn't have said that."

\* \* \*

><p><em>On the prison roof Oliver, who had heard every word, removed his ski mask.<em>

\_\*Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\*\_

\_Oliver stared at the caged bird, then lifted his eyes. 'Hey, please. We're starving. We never killed anything before.' Yao Fei only glanced impassively in their direction.\_

\_After a moment Matthew reluctantly opened the cage and Oliver pulled the bird out, holding it tightly. A squawk of protest came from the bird's throat. 'I'm sorry,' the older Queen whispered. They both looked away as Oliver twisted his hands, breaking the bird's neck - its final squawk cut short. Yao Fei glanced at them.\_

\* \* \*

><p>For once, no one spoke, not even Quentin. The sight of Oliver breaking the bird's neck was heartbreaking to watch, but everyone was beginning to realize that it had been necessary for them to learn to survive.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_On the roof, Oliver stared down at Laurel and her father, unshed tears glimmering in his eyes.\_

\_Lance draped his jacket over his daughter's shoulders. 'Let's get you home, sweetie,' h\_\_e said as he led her to his cruiser. 'How'd he get into that prison, anyway, \_\_huh? A grown man in an outfit \_\_and a hood, that kind of stands out a little, doesn't it?'\_

\_'He actually wasn't wearing the outfit this time. He was in a prison

\_\_guard uniform and a ski mask.' She noticed the look on his face.  
'\_\_What?'

\_'Nothing. I just had an idea.'"He \_\_opened the back passenger door of his cruiser. 'Get in the car.' Laurel obeyed and he shut \_\_the door after her, still deep in thought.\_\_

\_\_Elsewhere in the city, Walter and Matthew pulled up to a deserted, isolated warehouse. They walked up the steps to the side door. Matthew studied the keypad for a second before \_\_typing TEMPEST. A buzz signaled an incorrect code. He tried his name, then Oliver's and Thea's, all with the same result.\_\_

\_\_Finally, he typed in his father's name. \_\_ROBERT. With a faint click \_\_the door unlocked. He opened it the rest of the way and entered with Walter right behind him. Inside the warehouse, they found themselves on a catwalk suspended twenty feet above the floor. Walter located the light switch and flipped it on \_\_

\_\_- revealing, on the warehouse floor, the \_\_wreckage of the \*\*Queen's Gambit \*\*- with visible evidence that it had been sabotaged. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm turned to Moira, for once genuinely surprised. "I've underestimated you, Moira. You had the <strong>Gambit <strong>salvaged all this time and never said anything?" He chuckled in admiration. "I don't think you would have really used it as leverage against me, though." His tone was confident, assured. Moira glared at him, knowing full well what he meant by that remark - that she wouldn't reveal the truth about the \*\*Gambit \*\*because of the fact that it would sentence her lover to prison. \_You're wrong, Malcolm, \_she thought. \_I \_will \_expose your role in the \_\*\*\_Gambit's \_\*\*\_sinking if I have to.\_

Caitlin's eyes narrowed. She could tell that there was sexual tension between Mrs. Queen and Mr. Merlyn and found herself wondering if they were lovers.

The rest of the viewing party were surprised and shocked by the revelation, but none more so than Oliver and Matthew. Neither brother had ever thought they would see the yacht again.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew gripped the catwalk railing so tightly that his fingers hurt. Memories of that terrible night flashed through his mind, nearly overwhelming him. A gentle hand on his shoulder jolted him back to reality; he whirled to see Walter gazing at him in concern. 'Are you all right, son?'

\_\_The teen exhaled shakily and rubbed a hand across his face, looking back down at the yacht. 'Not really.'\_\_

\_\_Walter nodded. 'Do you want to go?'

\_'No, wait.' Matthew looked around until he saw the flight of stairs on the left side of the catwalk leading down to the floor. 'I want a closer look.'

\_Walter frowned, but made no move to stop his stepson. He watched as Matthew descended the stairs and slowly circled the \*\*Gambit, \*\*his boots crunching on loose debris. At one point he knelt and examined the bulkhead for several minutes. Finally he stood and came back up the steps.\_

\_'Find anything?'\_

\_Matthew nodded and cast a last look back at the floor. 'Let's go.'\_

\_Hilton, Lance, and a computer tech were gathered around a computer at the SCPD. 'OK\_, here's the security footage from the Exchange Building shooting, \_but I've already scrubbed through all of it,' the tech told the detectives.\_

\_Lance snorted. 'Yeah? Well, we're gonna do it again.' The tech sighed, but began to work as Lance continued, 'So, listen, when you went \_through the camera security tapes, you were looking for a guy in a green outfit and \_a green hood, right?'\_

\_'What do you want me to look for, a man in a wig and a tutu?' the tech said sarcastically. Lance glared at him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Roy, Tommy, and Thea all laughed.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I want you to look for anything that's out of the ordinary, OK? Just look.' The tech began fast forwarding the tape as the other two leaned forward. 'Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa. Go back ten seconds. Wait. Go back ten seconds,' Quentin instructed. The tech did so. On the computer screen, an easily recognizable Oliver Queen could be seen pulling a duffel out of the trash can. 'I'll be damned. Play that again.'<em>

\_'We have footage of another man dropping the bag into the trash can earlier,' the tech said.\_

\_'Show me,' Lance ordered, his face intense.\_

\_Moments later, Quentin Lance knew he had his answer as to who the Starling City vigilantes - or at least one of them - was.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin could not restrain a smirk. "Looks like I caught the brats red handed." He ignored the harsh glares Moira, Thea, Sara, and Laurel sent him.<p>

"You played right into our hands," Matthew retorted. "Do you think we didn't know the cams were there?"

Malcolm smiled thinly. "I suspected you did from the start. Well done."

\* \* \*

><p><em>The next day Laurel and a freed Peter Declan walked through the park. 'Thank you, Laurel,' he said sincerely.<em>

\_'Don't thank me. Thank Brodeur's bodyguard Ankov for flipping him. I think there's someone that wants to see you.' She and Declan looked at a bench ahead of them, where an elderly woman and a little girl waited.\_

\_'Izzy,' Declan breathed. Izzy turned and, spotting her father, ran to him. Declan knelt and held her in his arms as he wept. Laurel looked on with a smile.\_

\_At the Lair, the brothers watched the news coverage of Jason Brodner's arrest. 'At least five federal, state, and local agencies are seeking millions of dollars in fines and environmental cleanup costs from Brodeur Chemical. New facts have come to light that Brodeur Chemical employee Camille Declan had discovered Brodeur was illegally disposing waste and had collected a file of evidence against her employer before her murder in 2007. Peter Declan, who was convicted of killing his wife, has been released, and the case has been reopened.' Matthew opened the notebook and crossed out Brodeur's name.\_

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\*

\_Oliver and Matthew were devouring the cooked bird as the stranger sat across from them and spoke in Mandarin. 'Shengcun.'\_

\_'Yeah. Bird. I know,' Oliver replied.\_

\_' 'Shengcun' not mean 'bird.' 'Shengcun' mean 'survive'.'\_

\_'You speak English,' Matthew said in surprise.\_

\_'You want survive this place, bird not last thing you kill.' He held Laurel's photo up to Oliver. 'And forget her. You look at that all day, you not survive this place,' he advised.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Yao Fei was right," Oliver said. "I was spending too much time pining over Laurel, hoping I could one day make things right with her and Detective Lance. Without his pushing, I would have been completely unprepared for what came later." Matthew stifled a snort - in his opinion, it was only after they met Slade that Oliver had really begun to change.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_Elsewhere in the city, Moira entered a limousine and looked across at Malcolm Merlyn. 'You wanted to see me?'\_

\_'You look nervous, Moira,' he remarked.\_

\_'Do I have a reason to be?'\_

\_'We all do,' he said, showing her the sketch of the Hoods. \_

\_ 'A pair of modern-day Robin Hoods. What, are you worried that your net worth makes you a target?' she asked bitingly.\_

\_ 'Jason Brodeur, Adam Hunt, Warren Petel. Tell me you see a connection, Moira.' \_

\_ It only took a second for her to make the connection. 'They're not targeting the rich.' \_

\_ 'No, they're not,' Malcolm confirmed. 'They're targeting the List. But forget that for a moment.' He looked at her intently. 'Can I see you tonight?'

\_ 'Of course,' Moira replied. \_

\_ Malcolm smiled. 'Good.' He leaned forward and kissed her gently, his hand snaking around the back of her neck as he tugged her closer. Moira did not resist, her own hands coming up to grip Malcolm's shoulders as the kiss deepened.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>"What?" <em>Thea gasped, her voice rising. Robbie jerked and looked at his older sister with wide eyes. Walter quickly lifted the boy onto his lap as Thea stood, glaring accusingly at her mother. "You're sleeping with him? \_How could you?" \_Tommy gave his father a poisonous glare; Oliver rose and pinned his mother with a hard stare. Matthew clenched his fists, wishing he could leap at Malcolm and knock that small smile right off his face, but knew he couldn't without the Justice Leaguers intervening again. Walter looked at Moira with disappointment and betrayal in his eyes. Caitlin was not surprised that her guess as to Mrs. Queen and Mr. Merlyn's relationship was correct, but wondered how the woman could stand to be around Merlyn, much less sleep with him. The others' expressions were mainly shock, disgust or outrage.

Oliver's voice was ice cold when he addressed his mother. "How long?" For several minutes there was silence as everyone waited for an answer. The tension level was rising.

Finally, it was Malcolm who answered. "Since December 2007."

"Four months before Robbie was born," Walter said quietly. He turned to Moira. "And you still carried on the affair after you agreed to marry me?"

"I'm sorry, Walter."

"Uh-uh," Thea cut in, shaking her head vehemently. "If you were sorry, you wouldn't be doing this. Did you blackmail her?" she demanded, whirling on Malcolm. "Did you blackmail Mom into sleeping with you?"

Malcolm stared steadily at the girl. "No, Thea." The girl's glare hardened, but it was Moira who spoke up, surprising everyone.

"He's right, Thea." All three of her older children turned their attention back to her. "There's always been an attraction between us. I can't explain it, but it was there." Malcolm eyed her calmly. "After your father and your brothers disappeared and I found out I

was pregnant, Malcolm was there for me. The boundaries between us eroded."

Thea groaned in disgust. "Four years - under our roof, and I never knew!"

"Moirira," Walter said, "if you love him, why did you agree to marry me?"

Moirira closed her eyes. "It's not blind love, Walter. Not really."

"Then why?"

"Because of Robbie," she said simply. "I wanted my son to grow up with a stable father figure in his life, and Malcolm is not that person."

"What an understatement," Tommy muttered. Malcolm glared at his son.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion Diggle was standing by the sitting room windows, looking out at the grounds. Matthew cleared his throat as he and Oliver entered. 'You here for the bodyguard position? Cause the new guy just quit.'

\* \* \*

><p>Laughter rippled through the room.</p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'No, I'm not. I'm here about the other position,' Diggle said as he turned to them. Matthew extended his hand, but Diggle ignored it. 'Just to be clear, I'm not signing on to be a sidekick. But you're right. Fighting for this city needs to be done, and you're gonna do this with or without me.'

\_'Yeah.'\_

\_'But with me, there'll be fewer casualties, including you.'

—

\_'Diggle, we're not looking for anybody to save us,' Oliver interjected.\_

\_'Maybe not, but you need someone just the same. You are fighting a war, Queen, except you have no idea what war does to you, how it scrapes off little pieces of your soul. And you need someone to remind you of who you are, not this thing you're becoming.' This time Diggle held out his hand. After a second Matthew shook hands, followed by Oliver.\_

\_'The sound of a siren and the squeal of tires interrupted them. The front doors flew open and several officers entered, shouting for Oliver and Matthew.\_

\_'What is this?' Walter demanded. 'You can't just barge in

here.'\_

\_'Yeah? Well, I got a badge and a gun that say different,' Detective Lance snapped.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, really?" Eddie said disdainfully. "Using your badge as license to do whatever you think justified? Honestly, Quentin, you were acting no better than some of the cops in your own PD or Gotham here." Quentin shot the younger Detective a harsh glare.<p>

Laurel scowled at her father. "Did you even get a warrant for their arrest, Dad, or did you act on your own initiative?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver, Matthew, and Diggle entered the foyer. Four cops immediately moved to cuff the brothers. 'Hey, what the hell's going on?!' Matthew demanded as his hands were cuffed behind his back.<em>

\_'Oliver Queen, Matthew Queen, you're both under arrest on suspicion of obstruction of justice, aggravated assault -' \_

\_'What is going on?' Moira demanded behind Quentin. \_

\_'Walter, stop them!' Thea shouted from the second floor landing.

-

\_Lance continued, unfazed. ' - Trespassing, acting as a vigilante -'

-

\_'Are you out of your mind?!' Oliver shouted. \_

\_' - and murder,' Lance finished. The officers led the brothers to the door as Diggle, Moira, Walter, and Thea watched in shock. Walter pulled out his cell phone. 'You have the right to remain silent -' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira shot Lance a harsh glare as the recording ended. "I didn't believe you could stoop so low, Quentin. Do you really hate Oliver that much?"<p>

The cop shifted uncomfortably. "I - I thought -"

"You wanted to hurt Oliver because you thought he was responsible for my death," Sara cut in. "Now you see how wrong your vendetta against him was." Lance hung his head, ashamed, as Sara finished, "Even worse, you dragged Matt into the middle of it."

"We'll do one more recording and then stop for today to allow everyone time to rest and reflect," Clark Kent put in from the top row. "All right?" Slowly everyone turned to their hosts and nodded.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) \*\*Clark Kent's \*\*statement about a vigilante operating in \*\*Gotham \*\*is, of course, referring to \*\*Bruce\*\*. His "not at this point ... but soon" is meant to be taken in the context of the time \*\*(April 2012) \*\*that the viewers were pulled from, not \*\*2033. \*\*\*\*Bruce's \*\*return to Gotham after leaving the \*\*LOS \*\*occurs about a month after \*\*Oliver \*\*and\*\* Matthew's \*\*return to \*\*Starling\*\*, then by the beginning of \*\*2013 Bruce \*\*has begun operating as \*\*Batman. \*\*\_

\_2.) By the way, would anyone be interested in seeing occasional one shots showing certain events in \*\*Starling \*\*from the perspectives of \*\*Bruce\*\*, \*\*Lucius\*\* \*\*Fox\*\*, and \*\*Alfred\*\*?\_

## 6. Episode V: Damaged

\_\*\*Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu - North China Sea\*\*\_

\_Yao Fei loosed an arrow at a rabbit, killing it instantly. 'Dinner,' he announced. The brothers stared in disbelief at the dead animal.\_

\_Oliver groaned. 'Ah, come - hey, I got an idea, why don't you let me shoot that thing and you can go pick up the bloody, dead, disgusting animal,' he whined, pointing at the rabbit.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew snorted in disdain. Oliver glared at him, but the younger boy snapped, "Don't look at me like that. You were being childish right there. It wasn't the last time either, lest you forget."<p>

Oliver sighed softly. He knew his brother was right - he \_had \_been a whiner then and later, when they met Slade. The party boy influence had still been strong in those early days.

Quentin barely managed to bite back a smile as he listened to the younger Queen's teardown of Oliver's on screen attitude. He had interacted very little with Matthew before the \*\*Gambit's \*\*sinking, but he had always been impressed at how much more mature than his older brother the boy had been.

Malcolm had to refrain from rolling his eyes. He knew that if Tommy had been in that situation, his son would have reacted the same way.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Yao Fei only handed him his bow. 'What?'<em>

\_ 'Try. Breathe. Everything, breathe. Breathe, aim, fire,' he instructed, handing Oliver an arrow. 'Here.' Oliver managed to fit the arrow to the bow and drew slowly. \_

\_ 'Aim that tree,' Yao Fei advised. 'Breathe.' \_

\_ Oliver loosed the arrow - but it went wide to the right. Yao Fei



sighed, but took another arrow from his quiver for Matthew. The boy found it more difficult to draw the bow, but managed to fire - and his arrow went wide to the left.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't think that was too bad for a first try," Barry said, trying to be encouraging.<p>

Ra's remarked, "The bow may be one of the most difficult weapons for anyone to handle. Not many would have the strength to draw back a bowstring, especially on the heavier bows." He looked at Matthew. "The fact that you managed to handle Yao Fei's bow is impressive, considering your age at the time." Matthew nodded in acknowledgement.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Yao Fei muttered something in Mandarin. 'What does that mean?' Oliver asked in annoyance.<em>

\_ 'You will die badly,' Yao Fei said dryly. He pointed in the direction of the arrows. 'Get.' They both glared at him, but went to do as he said.\_

\_Just as Oliver reached the arrow he had shot, a hand clapped over his mouth, cutting off his cry. A few feet away Matthew was similarly taken; a black clad soldier kneed the boy viciously in the back as he tried to break free.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirira and Thea gasped. Matthew closed his eyes in resignation; he knew what was coming and hoped his twin wouldn't have too many nightmares over it. He slid his hand under his shirt, toward the scar on his ribs, but Talia caught his wrist and pulled his hand free. "Don't dwell on it," she whispered. "It's over and you're home." A ghost of a smile twisted his lips for just an instant as he leaned his head against her shoulder.<p>

Oliver went rigid in his seat, staring at the screen and ignoring the horrified looks he knew everyone except the LOA members were giving him.

Malcolm studied the mercenaries intently. \_What were they doing on a supposedly deserted island? \_he wondered. He knew that this would mark the real beginning of the brothers' trial by fire - their crucible, as it were, much like the crucible he had undergone after Rebecca's death with his time in the League.

Sara leaned forward. During their year on Lian Yu together, neither Oliver or Matthew had spoken much about what happened to them before the \*\*Amazo's \*\*arrival, so this was new to her. She was already beginning to see that this would be where Oliver had begun to change into the man she had encountered on the freighter.

\* \* \*

><p><em>The two were dragged, their hands bound, to a pit in the middle of the forest, shoved to their knees, and pushed inside. They

both groaned as they landed on the hard ground. The bamboo grate over the pit was lowered into place, locking them in. 'Wait, wait! You can't leave us here!' Matthew cried, grasping the grate with his bound hands. One of the soldiers smashed his fingers with the butt of his assault rifle. The boy screamed in pain and let go, falling back to the bottom of the pit. 'Don't do this to us, please! Oh - oh! No! Please! We didn't do anything!'

\* \* \*

"Ouch. That was brutal," Ronnie muttered with a grimace.

"I didn't know this until we were in Hong Kong, but the blow from the rifle broke two of my fingers and they never set properly," Matthew said. "Waller had an ARGUS doctor do surgery - not out of the goodness of her heart," he added dryly, seeing the looks of surprise from everyone else in the Starling and Central groups, even Malcolm. Oliver snorted as he recalled the reasons Waller had given for that.

"Did the surgery help?" Caitlin asked.

"Partially," the teen replied. "By the time Waller ordered it done, it had been almost two years since the initial break. The doc had to rebreak the fingers to get them to straighten out and even then, as you can see -" he held his hand out so everyone could see that the index and middle fingers on his right hand were bent slightly inward "- she couldn't straighten them out completely."

"If you come to STAR Labs, I can do X-Rays to see if it's possible to straighten them completely," Caitlin offered.

"Thank you, Dr. Snow. I may take you up on that."

"You can avail yourself of the Watchtower's medical bay, Dr. Snow," Clark Kent cut in. "There's no need to wait until you return to 2012." Caitlin looked up at the man and nodded.

"I accept the offer, Mr. Kent."

"If your fingers are bent, Matthew, how can you handle a bow?" Iris asked curiously.

"I've learned to adapt," the teen replied.

\* \* \*

**2012**\_

\_Both men were hustled out of the squad cars and into the SCPD by the officers as reporters shouted questions at them.\_

\* \* \*

Sara gave her father a harsh glare. Joe and Eddie both shook their heads, the Keystone Detective wondering if he should consider transferring to the SCPD instead of the CCPD. Quentin kept his eyes on the screen, not meeting anyone's gaze.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The police think they know who we are. They think we're the vigilantes. The men in the hoods terrorizing the city's criminals. They also think they have us trapped. That we have no way out. They're only half right.'

\_Once inside the SCPD, they were fingerprinted and had their mug shots taken before being led to an interrogation room.\_

\_'This is a mistake,' Oliver insisted as Lance began filling out the standard forms. Matthew shifted slightly in his seat, his handcuffs clinking faintly against the tabletop.\_

\_'I'll be asking you a few questions, standard stuff for the report,' Lance said, ignoring Oliver's statement. 'Have you been arrested before, Oliver? That's OK, I know the answer to that one. Plenty of times,' he said sarcastically.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Detective Lance," Dr. Stein said. "I'm sure Oliver would have preferred not being reminded about his previous arrests at all." The cop gave the older man a barbed glare.<p>

"Seriously, Lance, do you really expect Oliver's family will stand for this?" Eddie demanded. "Despite the video evidence, you're still using your vendetta against Oliver as justification. Consider yourself lucky if you get out of this with your Detective's shield still on your uniform." With that Eddie turned back to the recording.

"If you were with the CCPD, you would most likely be suspended or demoted for using department resources like that, and that's if you caught Captain Singh on a good day," Joe added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Like he said, this is a mistake,' Matthew repeated.<em>

\_'Far as I can tell, the only mistake I made was not shooting Oliver down at the docks when I had a chance,' Lance snarled.\_

\_'We are not who you think we are,' the teenager insisted. Lance scoffed.\_

\_'Oh, you're exactly who I think you are. You're both a dangerous menace who doesn't care about who they hurt, except now you're doing it with bows and arrows instead of trust funds and yachts.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Whoa!" Tommy objected. "That was out of line!"<p>

"I expected better from you, Detective," Walter said sharply. "Labeling Matthew a menace was uncalled for."

"You're right," Quentin admitted after a moment, "and I'm sorry." He glanced at Matthew. "Truly." Matthew nodded curtly, his expression betraying nothing.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Detective, you hate me. I get it,' Oliver pressed. 'But that doesn't make me a vigilante, or Matt.'

\_'No. The security camera footage of you both at the Unidac auction with a green hood does that pretty well.'\_

\_'And as I said again, I ran into the stairwell once I heard the shooting,' Oliver replied calmly. 'I saw a duffel bag that I thought maybe belonged to the shooter. I grabbed it, looked inside and saw a hood.'\_

\_'And what - you took it home with you? 'Cause we can't find it,' Lance retorted. 'And what about harassing Adam Hunt? That just happened to take place right across the street from your little homecoming bash.'\_

\_'Those were coincidences,' Matthew rebutted.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Muffled snickers could be heard from Barry, Cisco, and Roy.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'No. When they pile up like that, it becomes evidence,' Lance shot back. He resumed working on the forms until a patrolman opened the door. <em>

\_'Their parents are here.'\_

\_'Tell them to wait,' Lance ordered.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm barked an incredulous laugh. Quentin turned to him with a frown. "I fail to see what's funny, Merlyn," he said crossly.<p>

The businessman shook his head. "You need to learn, Lance, that Moira Queen does not take kindly to being told to wait."

"And you know this because you and her have been so \_close \_in recent years?" the cop said snidely. Malcolm's mirth vanished and he stared coldly at the man. Moira, too, glared at Quentin. Thea and Tommy shifted uncomfortably in their chairs, while Matthew and Oliver betrayed no outward reaction at the reminder of the elephant in the room.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira and Walter brushed right past the cop. 'I want to see my sons,' Moira snapped.<em>

\_'I'm in the middle of an interrogation here!' Lance bellowed.

\_

\_'Detective Lance,' Moira said furiously, 'I know you hate my family, but I had no idea that you'd go so far to arrest my sons without any

grounds whatsoever!'

'I have solid grounds, and I have evidence,' Lance said coldly as he stood.

'Which you can present to Mr. Queen's attorney when he gets here. Until then, this interrogation is over, Detective,' Walter said sternly.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well said, Mr. Steele," Nyssa remarked. "You are the only one who is being a voice of reason."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Lance scoffed and looked down at the brothers. 'Sure. You have fifteen minutes.' He stormed from the room, leaving the four of them alone.<em>

'Detective Lance appears to be on some personal vendetta,' Walter remarked.

'He is,' Oliver replied. 'He blames me for the death of his daughter. He also thinks that Matt and I dress up in hoods and shoot people with arrows.'

\* \* \*

><p>Sara said sharply, "Dad, you really need to stop doing that. It's ridiculous." Quentin sighed and rubbed his face. He knew his younger daughter was right, but how could anyone really expect him to let go of five years of anger and resentment in just a few days?<p>

Caitlin studied the older man and decided that when she got the chance, she would try to talk with him about his attitude toward Oliver.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The important thing is not to say anything until your attorney gets here,' Walter advised.<em>

'Fine. I want Laurel.'

\* \* \*

><p>"Say what?" Cisco sputtered. Barry and Iris turned to Oliver with disbelieving looks. Laurel was stunned by Oliver's statement.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Matthew turned to stare at his brother. 'Have you lost your mind?' <em>

'Moirira and Walter both scoffed. 'Brilliant,' Walter muttered.

'Oliver, I don't think your ex-girlfriend can be counted on to be objective here,' Moirira said.

\_'She knows me better than anyone. She knows that I could never be one of these guys.' He looked at his stepfather. 'Walter, you say Lance has a vendetta?'

\_'Yes.'

\_'I think Laurel can get him off of it. He raised her to do the right thing. That includes representing an innocent man. So, Mom, please.' Both sighed in resignation, but surrendered to Oliver's plea.

\* \* \*

><p>Roy snickered at the Detective's discomfort and was rewarded with a barbed look, but he shrugged it off. "Frankly, I find it amusing that your daughter's ex-boyfriend asked her to represent him."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira entered CNRI and looked around until she spotted the woman she had come to see. 'Laurel.'<em>

\_'Laurel looked up from the folder she was reading in surprise. 'Mrs. Queen! What are you -'

\_'It's Oliver. Something's happened,' Moira told her.

\_'I know,' Laurel said, glancing at the TV where a news report on the brothers' arrest was in progress. 'It's been all over the news.'

\_'Moira sighed. 'These charges are ludicrous.'

\_'I know,' Laurel replied. 'Can I ask you who's representing them?'

\_'Well, that's why I'm here,' Moira said slowly. 'Oliver wants you to represent them.'

\_'Me?' Laurel echoed, even more surprised than before.

\_'Yes,' Moira replied. 'I told him it was a bad idea, but to be frank, I am desperate. He says if you don't represent them, then they don't want any attorney.'

\_'Mrs. Queen, my father is the arresting officer,' she pointed out.

\_'Yes.'

\_'And I don't think it's a good idea for me to represent someone who I've been involved with.' She rushed on as Moira's face fell. 'Listen, I am sorry for what your family is going through -'

\_'No apologies,' Moira said firmly. 'Your idealism, I think, is why my older son, for all his mistakes, is so smitten with you. Regardless, it was a bad idea on his part, and I am sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable.' Laurel managed a faint smile as Moira left.

\* \* \*

><p>Thea eyed Laurel. "Somehow I get the feeling you're going to change your mind."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later that day the brothers' case was heard in the courtroom. 'Docket 81941, People vs. Oliver and Matthew Queen,' the baliff intoned. Oliver and Matthew entered the courtroom escorted by two officers. Cameras flashed as they took their places at the defendant's table. 'Murder, aggravated assault, assault with intent, menacing and trespassing.' The bailiff hand the sheet to Judge Moss.<em>

\_ 'Where's your attorney, Mr. Queen?' Moss wanted to know.\_

\_ 'We're representing ourselves, Judge,' Oliver replied calmly. The DA looked over at them in disbelief from the other table.\_

\_ 'I'm not sure that's the wisest course, Mr. Queen.' \_

\_ 'We think it is. We're innocent,' Matthew said firmly as they both stood.\_

\_ 'Then we'll consider that your plea,' Moss said.\_

\_ 'Thank you,' Matthew said as they sat back down.\_

\_ 'Now, as to bail -' Moss started, but DA Kate Spencer interrupted her as she stood.\_

\_ 'Your Honor, Mr. Queen's family owns a pair of private jets, and, well, on the subject of their wealth, I would point out that there is virtually no bail amount that can guarantee their presence at trial.' \_

\_ A voice from the back of the courtroom interceded. 'So then I guess it's a good thing that the peoples' case is so circumstantial.' Laurel made her way past the stunned Queen family, and her even more stunned father, to the defendant's table as Oliver and Matthew moved aside to let her sit down. 'Dinah Laurel Lance, Your Honor,' she announced. 'I'd like to file my appearance on behalf of the defendants.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea, Tommy, and Roy laughed as Quentin glowered at the screen with a sour look.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Mr. Queen's wealth should not deprive them of the right to be released on bail while under the presumption of innocence,' Laurel continued, glancing at Spencer.<em>

\_ 'They are a flight risk,' Spencer countered.\_

\_ 'Then minimize the risk,' Laurel shot back. 'The defendants are willing to submit to home confinement and electronic monitoring

through the wearing of a UKG45 administrated ankle device.' Surprise rippled through the courtroom; Lance was shaking his head.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Just perfect," Matthew snapped, giving the lawyer an icy stare.<p>

Malcolm's lips twitched. "Oh, I'm sure you'll find a way to get around it, Matthew."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'No, they wouldn't,' Matthew growled, glaring at Laurel.<em>

\_'Sold,' Moss said.\_\_

\_'Your Honor -' Spencer tried to argue, but Moss overrode her.\_\_

\_'Bail is set at fifteen million each. Five million bond. Defendants to see probation for the fitting of a GPS device.' Moira closed her eyes and Detective Lance looked on in disbelief. Oliver sighed in frustration as Moss banged the gavel to close the hearing.\_\_

\_'I knew you couldn't resist saving my ass,' Oliver muttered.\_\_

\_'You're going to make me regret this, aren't you?' Laurel replied with a smirk.\_\_

\_'No. It's going to be like old times.'\_\_

\_'Fortunately for you with the legal case, there's no way that you're one of these vigilante, or Matt,' she continued.\_\_

\_'I agree,' he added.\_\_

\_'Because they're actually trying to make a difference, and we both know that's not really your style.' She didn't see the hurt look in his eyes.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara snorted in disdain. "You're being a bitch again, Laurel." Laurel's face flamed as she realized Sara was right.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion the probation officer finished fastening the GPS device around Matthew's ankle, tested it, and then, satisfied, moved to Oliver. Moira, Walter, and Tommy looked on.<em>

\_'Mom,' Oliver tried to reassure his mother, 'It's not that bad.' She only turned away.\_\_

\_'OK, this device has a direct line into the precinct. Stay on the property, you're golden. Any questions?' the officer asked as he finished.\_\_



\_ 'Yes,' Oliver said immediately. 'I'm having a sizeable get together here tomorrow evening, and there is a better than likely chance it spills into the outdoor pool.' Matthew made a surprised sound in his throat as Tommy and Moira looked at Oliver in disbelief. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Walter sighed as Moira groaned. "Really, Oliver?" the Brit said quietly as he turned to his stepson. "You're thinking of throwing a party when you and Matthew are both under house arrest and facing prison?" The younger man winced and looked away from his stepfather, knowing that what his onscreen self had just done was something he himself would have done before the <strong>Gambit.</strong>

The younger adults from the Central group couldn't help staring at Oliver in surprise and dismay, even though they knew that this incident was still some months into the future. \_Was this what he was like before the yacht went down? \_Cisco wondered. Iris, Barry, and Ronnie were shaking their heads. Caitlin frowned and glanced at Oliver.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Pool deck's fine. Step on the grass, they're sending a SWAT team to forcibly subdue you,' the officer said dryly.</em>

\_ 'Thank you, Officer,' Walter said as he accompanied the cop out, leaving Moira and Tommy with the brothers\_

\_ 'A 'sizeable get together'?' Moira said incredulously.\_

\_ 'I'm confined to this house for the foreseeable future,' Oliver replied lightly. 'I might as well make the most of it. And this party is going to be themed. I'm thinking prison, uh, burning man meets 'Shawshank Redemption'. The invite says, 'Come before Oliver Queen gets off'.'\_

\_Robbie ran into the room and clambered onto the couch beside his brothers, leaning over curiously to look at the monitor around Oliver's ankle. 'What's that, Ollie?' he asked as he fingered it.

\_

\_ 'Robbie, don't touch it,' Oliver said mildly. The four year old pulled his hand back and looked at Oliver with a guilty expression, but the older brother only smiled and ruffled Robbie's hair. 'I'm not angry, Robbie, but you don't need to be messing with it. It's a bracelet that will keep track of where I go for the next few days.'\_

\_ 'Why?' Robbie asked with an innocent look. \_

\_The four exchanged looks. 'I'll tell you when you're older,' Oliver said after a moment. Robbie pursed his lips in a pout, but Oliver added, 'Promise.' Robbie gave him a stare that was so like their mother's that Oliver had to fight the urge to laugh. \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ohh, that's so cute!" Iris gushed. Barry and Cisco both grinned

widely.<p>

Tommy and Laurel chuckled. "Seems Robbie can give you that stare too," Tommy said, turning to Oliver with a grin. Moira smiled as she glanced at Walter before looking down at her youngest son and smoothing his hair back. Robbie squirmed and tried to bat his mother's hand away, prompting more laughter from the others.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Maybe a party's not in the best of taste, you know, considering the circumstances,' Tommy put in as he sat down next to his friend.<em>

\_'Tommy, the circumstances are why we're having the party in the first place,' Oliver replied. 'I want people to know that I'm not worried about any of this.'\_

\_'Well, that makes one of us,' Moira said sharply.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver smirked as he figured out where this was going. Dusan leaned toward him and whispered with a sly grin, "Oh, this is going to be entertaining to watch."<p>

Felicity began to laugh. "This is brilliant." Seeing the baffled stares she was getting, she clarified, "Oliver's holding the party so that people will see both him and Matthew there while they recruit someone to pose as the Hoods - or at least one of them."

Quentin's expression turned sour, prompting snickers from the younger adults.

Malcolm shook his head in mingled admiration and frustration. "Your plan is a sound one, but you're putting it into action too early. Had you waited until the trial started, then had someone pose as the Hoods, the charges would have been dropped immediately." Matthew grimaced as he realized that Malcolm's suggestion was a sound one and mentally berated himself for not thinking of it earlier. Oliver, too, was nonplussed that he had overlooked something so obvious.

Ra's knew his former Horseman's logic was sound. Still, Oliver Queen was to be commended for his use of League tenets to aid in dispelling the cloud of suspicion he and young Matthew were currently under.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Laurel's apartment the lawyer was in a terse discussion with her father. 'Before you start yelling -'<em>

\_'Why would I yell?' he said harshly. 'You're only defending the man that killed your sister.'\_

\_'Oliver did not kill Sara!' Laurel snapped in exasperation.\_

\_'If it wasn't for him, she wouldn't have been on that boat,' he retorted.\_

\_'Have you considered the possibility that that's the reason you're

trying to make him out to be this - this menace?' Laurel said heatedly.\_

\_'No. It is the videotape, it's the suspicious timing, that is the reason! '\_

\* \* \*

><p>Roy snorted. "Bullshit."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'This is Oliver Queen we're talking about. He wrecks fancy cars and he dates models. He doesn't kill people.'<em>

\_'No, he just uses them, like he used Sara and like he used you, and he's only asked you to be his lawyer to get at me,' her father roared.\_

\_'No, he asked me to be his lawyer to get through to you,' Laurel snapped. 'You hate the Hoods and you hate Oliver, and you want more than anything for him to be one of them. But Oliver isn't the reason why Sara died, or the reason Mom left.'\_

\_'I don't have to listen to this,' Lance said in disgust, striding past her. Her next words stopped him short.\_

\_'By the way, you're not the only one who misses them.' He exhaled slowly as he met her eyes, before he turned away and walked out. Laurel sighed sadly as she watched him go.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Dad," Sara said acidly. The Detective flinched.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion the brothers were in Oliver's bedroom. Matthew had just told Oliver of his and Walter's discovery the previous night. 'The <strong>Gambit<strong>?' Oliver asked in shock. 'You're certain? '\_

\_'Yes.'\_

\_Oliver dropped his head into his hands, his mind reeling. Their mother had ordered the **Gambit** salvaged, and funneled funds from Queen Consolidated to do it. \_

\_But why? Could she have become mixed up in whatever their father had been involved in? If so, had she known before the **Gambit** sank, or had she been told afterwards?\_

\_Most frightening - was Thea and Robbie's safety at risk? Someone had planted a bomb on the **Gambit** with the intention of killing their father - could whoever was responsible try to harm Thea or Robbie?\_

\_'There's more going on here than just Dad wanting us to right his wrongs, Oliver,' Matthew murmured. 'The List, the **Gambit**, your kidnapping - it all has to be part of a wider plan. But what? '\_

\* \* \*

><p>Both brothers shot Malcolm identical harsh glares while Thea did the same to Moira.<p>

Dr. Stein shook his head. "I don't know what you're mixed up in, Mr. Merlyn, or why you feel you had to try to murder a man who was your friend, but I do know this - whatever darkness is in your heart is eating you alive inside. If you don't fight it, it will corrupt you completely."

"Very astute, Doctor," Malcolm said harshly, "but I have no need for your counsel. I made my choices years ago and I will not go back now."

\* \* \*

><p><em>A knock at the door heralded Diggle's arrival. 'Thank you for coming. Shut the door.' Diggle did so as Oliver leaned back in his chair.<em>

\_'I guess it was just a matter of time before the police caught up with you,' the bodyguard observed.\_

\_'Except they didn't,' Matthew corrected.\_

\_'They got you on video,' Diggle protested.\_

\_'We knew the security camera was there, just like we knew the police would review the footage and arrest us. All part of the plan,' Matthew clarified.\_

\_'So you wanted to get arrested?' Diggle asked, dumbfounded.\_

\_'Well, we returned to Starling City and a few days later the vigilantes appear. Sooner or later, somebody was going to make the connection,' Oliver said quietly.\_

\_'So what part of serving yourselves up to the cops will help you avoid going to prison for the rest of your life?' Diggle demanded.\_

\_'There's more to it.'\_

\_'Well, there better be, for your sake, because your family is freaking out downstairs. Oliver, Matthew, your mother and your siblings just got you back, and now you're going to put them through a trial, maybe even worse? Don't you care?'

\_'Of course we care. The mission comes first.' Matthew turned the computer around so Diggle could see the photo on the screen. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea growled in anger and leaned over to slap her twin across the back of the head. "Don't you <em>ever <em>do anything like that again, Brandon Matthew Queen!" The seventeen year old looked chagrined by his sister's rebuke and nodded silently. Oliver, too,

was discomfited by Thea's reaction and knew he fully deserved it. Moira didn't look too pleased with her sons either, but chose to say nothing.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Who is he?' the bodyguard asked.<em>

\_'Leo Mueller. German arms dealer,' Matthew said. 'Suspected in the theft of a hundred M249 Squad Automatic Weapons.'\_

\_'OK,' Diggle said.\_

\_'Last night he arrived in Starling City to sell the guns,' Matthew finished.\_

\_'Matthew, don't you imagine there's enough trouble you're in this week than to go after this guy?' Diggle said, exasperated.\_

\_'I imagine what would happen if a street gang got their hands on military-grade hardware. I imagine our city's streets turned into a war zone,' Oliver replied stonily.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Roy winced. "You're right," he said to Oliver. "The Glades is already bad enough. Throw these guns in -" he shivered.<p>

"Especially in the hands of people who care nothing about the lives of others," Tommy added coldly. Malcolm snorted in disdain.

"This is one guy that definitely needs to go behind bars," Quentin Lance said. At the surprised looks from the others, he snorted. "Please. I'm not saying I condone Queen's vigilantism here, but the mob bosses can't get their hands on weapons like these. If they do the fallout would be much, much worse. I won't see Starling turning into Gotham."

"You surprise me, Detective," Oliver said quietly. Lance looked at the younger man, for once no trace of anger or condescension on his face, just deadly earnestness.

"Jim Gordon and I were friends when we were younger, Oliver. Even though we went to the police academy in different cities, we still kept in touch often. I know how bad Gotham is becoming, and I refuse to see it happen here." He shook his head. "It's a shame, really. I enjoyed visiting Gotham in the past, but now it's nothing but a cesspool with Carmine Falcone and the Mob practically in control."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'But you're under house arrest, both of you, which means you can't just go after this guy,' Diggle pointed out.<em>

\_'Matthew sighed. 'Look, for now, we would just like you to shadow Mueller. We would like you to track his movements. We want to know where the buy is happening.'\_

\_'OK. And how am I supposed to track him?'\_

\_'Well, you know us billionaire vigilantes. We do love our toys,'  
Oliver deadpanned.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver's lips twitched in amusement as a squeal came from the row ahead of him. Dusan laughed and leaned forward to call, "A little enthusiastic, aren't you, Mr. Ramon?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later Diggle arrived at the factory and made his way downstairs to the Lair. Fli<em>\_pping the light switch, he was stunned by everything he saw.\_ \_He walked around, taking note of what was there. Gingerly he touched the tip of an arrow and winced. 'Ow! '\_

\_Finally he found what he was looking for beside the computers - a black case. He opened the lid and studied the three GPS transponders inside before picking one up; it activated with a beep. 'Oh, well, that's sweet.' \_

\_At Queen Consolidated Josiah Hudson, the head of security, entered the CEO's office to see Walter standing by the window. 'You wanted to see me, sir?' Walter turned to him.\_

\_'No, I didn't. In fact, this meeting isn't taking place.' He gestured Josiah toward the chair on the other side of the desk. The security officer took his seat as Walter sat behind the desk. 'How long have you been head of security at Queen Consolidated, Josiah?' \_

\_'Going on seven years now, sir,' he replied.\_

\_'Sounds about right.' Walter leveled a steady gaze at Josiah. 'But what I'm about to tell you will test the bounds of your discretion. You're aware of the \*\*Queen's Gambit\*\*, Robert Queen's ill-fated yacht?' Josiah nodded. 'Well, I found it,' he revealed, leaning forward to observe the other man's reaction.\_

\_'Sir, the boat went down in the North China Sea five years ago,' Josiah said in disbelief.\_

\_'Which is why my - and my stepson's - discovery of its remains in a warehouse downtown was unexpected, to say the least.' Walter handed Josiah a slip of paper with an address on it. 'I want you to transfer those remains to a secure location. Can I count on you?' \_

\_Josiah chuckled. 'What's going on, sir?' \_

\_'That's very much what I'm trying to determine,' Walter replied. With that the meeting ended.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm leveled a cold glare at Walter, who matched it with one of his own. Quentin rolled his eyes and thought, <em>Why couldn't Steele just go to the SCPD with the truth? Of course, there's no guarantee Commissioner Nudocerdo or Lieutenant Pike would believe

him.<em>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Laurel and Oliver met with Detective Lance and Kate Spencer at the SCPD. 'Thank you both for coming,' Spencer said.<em>

\_'No, thank you,' Oliver replied glibly. 'It's nice to get out of the house.'\_

\_'I'll cut right to it,' Spencer said, addressing Laurel. 'Detective Lance arrested your clients without consulting my office first. So congratulations. I am willing to consider a plea in this case.'\_

\_'Absolutely not,' Oliver replied at once. Laurel glared at him, but Oliver only looked at her steadily.\_

\_'Mr. Queen and his brother spent five years in seclusion on a deserted island, cut off from civilization,' Spencer continued. 'It is quite possible they're suffering from some form of post traumatic stress. Given that, we would support a plea of insanity. Conditional on a period of indeterminate incarceration at a psychiatric facility.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Dr. Stein said shortly, "If she seriously thinks they're crazy, then she's a fool. Everything they've done so far has a purpose to it."<p>

Caitlin nodded. "A lot of people who are called crazy for crimes they've committed in fact knew exactly what they were doing."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'No, thank you. We're not crazy,' Oliver shot back, unable to believe what he was hearing.<em>

\_'Finally something we agree on,' Lance snapped. 'They're not nuts, they're a killing machine.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Would you dare to call me that to my face?" Sara said coldly, eyeing her father with a hard stare. Quentin grimaced internally as he realized how thoughtless the statement from his onscreen self had been.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Actually, we're neither,' Oliver replied.<em>

\_'There is nothing you can say to me that I would believe,' Lance snarled.\_

\_'I'll take a polygraph,' he offered. Laurel whipped around to stare at him in disbelief.\_

\_'Uh, polygraphs are inadmissible.'\_

\_ 'In front of the jury,' Oliver admitted. He nodded at Quentin. 'I'll take a polygraph in front of him. He's the one I need to convince.' \_

\_ 'And your brother?' Spencer asked. 'Would he take one too?' \_

\_ Oliver's jaw tightened. 'No,' he said sharply. 'Leave Matthew alone.' Spencer glanced at Lance, but the Detective shook his head, telling her not to press the issue. \_

\* \* \*

><p> Talia said icily, "Don't even think about about it, Spencer. I will not have Matthew subjected to a polygraph." <p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I'm going to need a minute,' Laurel said testily. She stood as her father and Spencer did, waiting for them to leave the room. When the door closed, she whirled on Oliver. 'You're looking at life in prison - and so is Matt. What Spencer just offered you is a gift.' <em>

\_ 'I'm not crazy. I am innocent. I kind of want to take the polygraph. And if I take it and I fail, then I will consider making a deal,' he replied. \_

\_ Laurel sighed. 'Fine. I'll set up the poly. And I will tell Spencer that we're not pleading out, but Oliver, you have a family. People who actually care about you. So don't, for one second, think you're the only person with something to lose here.' She exhaled slowly. 'I'll be right back.' \_

\_ Oliver stayed where he was, his face thoughtful, as she left the room. \_

\* \* \*

><p> "Why did you want to take a polygraph?" Thea asked, looking at Oliver. "Wouldn't it have shown you were lying?" <p>

"A properly trained man can fool the machine into thinking he's telling the truth," Joe told her. He glanced at Oliver. "I assume that's a skill you picked up with ARGUS?"

"Partly," Oliver admitted.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea<strong> \_

\_ Four mercenaries marched the brothers, their hands still bound, into the middle of a camp. Both looked around curiously; having thought they were alone on the island, it was a shock to see this many men. They did not have long to look around, though, for the mercs led them to a tent and pushed them inside. They were prodded toward two poles in the center of the tent and with a final shove sent crashing into



the wood.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew looked away from the screen, his shoulders tensing as he recalled that first meeting with Fyers and Wintergreen.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The poles bracketed a table where a black clad man sat watching them coldly. Two empty chairs waited on the other side of the table.<em>

\_'Please, sit,' the stranger said. 'You're making me feel rude.'  
Oliver eyed him warily for a moment, his breathing ragged, before he slumped into a chair. Matthew did the same. 'I do apologize for my men's treatment of you,' he told them as he opened a can of soda. Matthew eyed the movement, the longing clear in his eyes. 'They're trained to view any stranger as hostile. I'm Edward Fyers, by the way. And you are?'

\_'I'm Oliver Queen, and this is my brother Matthew,' Oliver said in a rush. 'We were shipwrecked here. We don't know for how long. Our family has money. They have lots of money. You would be - you'd be really well compensated for our rescue.'  
><em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Commendable attempt, Oliver Queen," Nyssa said softly, "but you underestimated Fyers by thinking you could appeal to his greed. He is a mercenary, yes, but not all mercenaries are motivated by money."<p>

Oliver nodded sharply. "As Matt and I found out too late." His eyes darkened as he recalled those first minutes in Fyers' tent. How naïve he had been then.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Well, I look forward to that,' Fyers said blandly. 'But for the moment, let's just talk.'<em>

\_'About what?' Oliver asked.\_\_

\_'Well, for instance, this gentleman,' Fyers said, reaching to the cabinet behind him and palming a photograph, which he showed them. 'Do you know him?'

\_'Both brothers instantly recognized the man in the photo - a younger Yao Fei in a Chinese Army uniform. \_

\_'No,' Matthew muttered, the first time he had spoken since they entered the tent. Oliver was grateful for his brother's denial - Fyers was making him uneasy.\_\_

\_'No?' Fyers repeated.\_\_

\_'No. Who's he?' Oliver rebutted.\_\_

\_ 'You're a poor liar,' Fyers snarled. 'I've been polite. I'll offer you one more chance before my manners leave me.' \_

\_ 'Hey, hey - we don't know this guy. We thought we were on this island all by ourselves,' Oliver said desperately. \_

\_ 'Do you know what this island is named?' Fyers said coldly. 'We're on Lian Yu - Mandarin for 'Purgatory', and I can make it feel like hell,' he snarled, looking them both in the eye as he rose. Picking up his drink, he circled the table to pause behind them. 'I don't know why you're protecting him. You're young, foolish. Perhaps you don't know why, either. Think on that when you're begging for death.' He left the tent, pausing a moment to snap, 'They're yours now.' \_

\_ A second later a mercenary entered the tent in a black uniform and blue-and-gold balaclava that concealed his face. He was heavily armed. \_

\* \* \*

><p>With the exception of Talia and Dusan (who already knew the truth) the rest of the guests were shocked when Sara rounded on the brothers, her eyes dark with anger. "What the hell?" she hissed. "How could you trust him, knowing he was working for Edward Fyers?! That was stupid thing to do, Ollie! I should have killed Slade myself! If I had, he wouldn't have tortured both of you later!"<p>

"Enough, Sara!" Matthew snapped, anger sparking in his eyes. "That is not Slade Wilson." Sara looked at him in surprise.

"Not Slade? But I thought ..."

"The balaclava," Matthew said shortly. "That's what Oliver and I thought when we first met Slade, because he had one just like it, but Slade told us that man -" he nodded at the screen " - was his former ASIS partner Billy Wintergreen. Fyers offered them both a chance to join him. Wintergreen accepted, Slade didn't." His tone hardened. "I have to admit I'm surprised at you, Sara. Jumping to conclusions with so few facts? That's something your father would do." Laurel and Quentin both grimaced as Sara gave the teen a stony stare before settling back in her seat.

After several seconds of awkward silence, Tommy looked at his friend and said hesitantly, "This isn't going to be good, is it?"

'No,' Oliver said flatly, his voice tight with remembered pain. The tension level in the auditorium skyrocketed as the other members of the party stiffened in their chairs, wondering how long it would be before the next flashback.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_ At the mansion Thea was sitting pensively in a chair by the pool, watching workmen set up for the party. Matthew came out on the deck to sit beside her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. She smiled and leaned against him. A faint clunk caught their attention. Matthew frowned in irritation and grumbled under his breath, 'Stupid ankle monitor' as he reached down and pulled his leg up onto the chair, the

device sliding down to rest on top of his bare foot.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Barry and Cisco quickly tried to suppress their snickers, but were unsuccessful. Matthew rolled his eyes.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea looked away, unable to stand the reminder that her brothers were under house arrest.<em>

\_Oliver poked his head out the door then. 'Hey, Speedy. One of the workers left a keg too far from the bar. Can you ask them to move it, please? I got the ankle thingie.' He shook his foot. 'I don't want to set off a SWAT invasion.' Thea just stared at him with a devastated look. \_

\_'Hey! All this stuff? It's going to be fine, I promise,' he tried to reassure her as he came out on the deck and sat down in the chair next to her and Matthew. Robbie joined them, climbing into the chair beside Oliver with a toy action figure held tightly in his hand.\_

\_'Yeah, well, when you, Matt, and Dad left on the yacht, you promised me I'd see you in a few days. Which didn't happen.' Matthew winced and laid his head on Thea's shoulder.\_

\_Oliver was silent for a second. 'This is different than that. We didn't do any of this stuff, you know that. Right?' he pressed.\_

\_'You're out all the time. You have those scars, and since you've been back, you've been acting really weird,' Thea replied.\_

\_'None of this makes me some Robin Hood wannabe, or Matt.'\_

\_'And you get me this,' Thea pointed out, rolling the Hozen in her hands. 'I mean, it's an arrowhead.'\_

\_Oliver sighed. 'Oh, man.' Matthew shot him a look that said, \*\*You had to know she'd figure it out eventually.\*\*\_

\_'Thea, I bought that in the gift shop of the Beijing airport,' he lied.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew winced and avoided his twin's eyes, not wanting to see the look he knew must be on her face. Oliver, too, felt a wave of guilt at seeing that he had so brazenly lied to his little sister. 'I'm sorry, Thea,' he finally whispered, not daring to look at her.<p>

The girl leaned over and grasped her older brother's chin, forcing him to meet her eyes. 'You don't have to be sorry, Ollie. I'm not happy that you both lied to me, but I'm beginning to understand why you did it. I just want us to learn to trust each other again, like we used to before the \*\*Gambit.\*\*'

"Thea's right, Oliver," Moira said as she turned to her eldest. "I admit that we've become jaded over the last five years and it will take time for us to learn to be a family again, but I believe we can do it. Oliver gave his mother a small smile and slowly nodded. Thea nudged Matthew lightly in the arm; he finally looked at her with a hesitant smile and wrapped his arms around her.

\* \* \*

><p><em> She clearly didn't know whether to believe him. 'Now I'm sort of happy I didn't buy you the shot glass with the panda on it, 'cause then you'd be worried I was panda man.'<em>

\_That finally coaxed a laugh from Thea. 'You know, I knew you couldn't be this person. I - I just - I can't lose either of you again.' Her voice cracked just slightly.\_

\_'Deal,' Oliver said quietly.\_

\_In his office at Merlyn Global, Malcolm looked up as Moira entered, 'Moira. Thank you for coming on such short notice,' he said pleasantly.\_

\_'Yes. Could you please make this quick? I'm in the midst of somewhat of a family emergency,' she snapped as she sat down.\_

\_'Yes, of course. It's all over the local news.' He chuckled. 'Possibly even national.'\_

\_'Well, I know what you're thinking,' Moira replied.\_

\_'Do you?' was all he said.\_

\_'My sons are not the men targeting the list,' she said firmly. 'The charges are preposterous.'\_

\_'Not according to the district attorney, assistant district attorney, investigating detective in the police department that filed charges against them,' he said harshly.\_

\_'That detective has a vendetta against my family,' she shot back angrily.\_

\_'Why? Is there something untoward about your family?' he asked. Moira's eyes flicked to Malcolm's bodyguard. 'If so, something really needs to be done about that.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You're up to something, Dad," Tommy hissed. "I can tell." Malcolm favored his son with a cold smile, but did not reply. Moira glared at her lover; she suspected what was going through his mind and was mentally berating herself for being so careless.<p>

Ra's raised an eyebrow. He knew what Al-Sa-Her would do and was mildly intrigued as to how it would play out, though Al-Sa-Her's bodyguard likely would not make it out alive.

Joe's eyes narrowed. \_Surely Merlyn wouldn't be insane enough to send his bodyguard after the brothers, would he?\_ the cop wondered.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the SCPD, Oliver and Laurel sat at a table across from Detective Lance and a polygraph tech. Oliver was hooked up to the machine. 'Is your name Oliver Queen?' Lance began.<em>

\_'You don't know who I am, Detective?' Oliver joked.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver had to suppress a smile.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The questions are to calibrate the polygraph,' Lance snapped. 'Is your name Oliver Queen? '<em>

\_'Yes.' \_

\_'Were you born in Starling City May 16th, 1985?' \_

\_'Yes.' \_

\_'Is your hair blue?' \_

\_'No.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco burst into laughter. Quentin turned and stared at him, but the younger man only shrugged. "Dude, that's a dumb question to be asking."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Have you ever been to Iron Heights Prison? '<em>

\_'No,' Oliver replied calmly. Laurel glanced at him in surprise before quickly composing herself.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver frowned. "I didn't go to Iron Heights, did I?"<p>

"We did," Laurel reminded him. "Eighth grade school field trip."

"Oh," he muttered, shaking his head. "I'd forgotten."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Lance held up a sketch of the Hoods. 'Are you one of the men in this picture? '<em>

\_Abruptly Oliver recalled being tied by his hands to one of the poles in Fyers' tent as Fyers loomed before him. 'Where can I find the man in this picture?' Fyers demanded. 'Think carefully on your answer or your brother will pay the price.' Oliver looked over at Matthew, who was tied to the other pole; the masked mercenary stood close to him

with his sword a bare inch away from Matthew's shirt. The boy groaned as the ropes bit into his wrists. Oliver looked back into Fyers' eyes and pressed his lips together. \_\_'Very well.' Fyers nodded sharply to the mercenary, who pulled Matthew's shirt up and slowly slid the blade between the twelve year old's ribs. His brother's screams rang in Oliver's ears until the boy mercifully passed out.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra gasped and turned away, closing her eyes. What kind of man had her sons tangled with? This Edward Fyers clearly did not care a whit about anyone but himself. A spark of rage flared in her heart. She hoped that the bastard was dead.<p>

Thea clapped a hand over her mouth, trying to stifle a scream. She hadn't expected that her twin would be tortured to try to force Oliver to reveal Yao Fei's whereabouts.

Walter was shocked and seething at Fyers' brutality.

Tommy quickly pulled Thea close as she began to cry. His own emotions were roiling. \_Jesus, Ollie, \_he thought wearily. \_How in the hell did you manage to keep going after that?\_

Quentin Lance felt sick to his stomach. How could he have been so callous in the recording? He knew his on screen self couldn't have realized that the questions he was asking would trigger Oliver's memories of the torture, but still ... He turned to look at Oliver and said hoarsely, "Queen, I'm sorry. I truly am." Oliver stared impassively at him for a moment, then nodded slightly.

Cisco groaned and bolted for the trash can on the aisle, leaning over it as he fought to control the nausea rising in his throat. \_Deep breath, deep breaths, \_he thought. Slowly the nausea began to ebb, and a few minutes later he staggered back to his seat.

Diggie glowered at Fyers. The mercenary reminded him far too much of some of the men he had seen in Afghanistan who had tortured and maimed innocent locals for no reason other than their own enjoyment.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'No,' he replied in answer to Lance's question. Lance looked at him, clearly not believing the answer. The polygraph tech nodded slightly. Lance licked his lips before continuing. <em>

\_'You steal forty million dollars off Adam Hunt?'\_

\_'No, I didn't.'\_

\_'Were you marooned on an island called Lian Yu for five years?'\_

\_'Yes.'\_

\_'How is that even relevant?' Laurel interjected sharply.\_

\_'I don't need to show relevance, but since you asked, whatever happened to your clients on that island turned them into cold blooded

killers,' her father growled.\_\_

\_Oliver remembered the merc stepping toward him, his blade stained with Matthew's blood - the feel of cold steel against his chest as his shirt was pulled aside - the blade slicing into his chest as he screamed in pain.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Joe winced and internally cursed Fyers. Torturing an innocent twelve year old was despicable enough, but using the same sword on his older brother? The mercenary leader definitely had a sick sense of humor.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'The physician that examined you reported that your body is covered in scar tissue,' Lance said coldly. Oliver stayed silent.<em>

\_'The machine won't work unless you ask a question,' Laurel reminded her father pointedly.\_\_

\_'Did that happen to you there?' Lance demanded.\_\_

\_'Yes.'\_\_

\_'When you came back, you told everyone that you and Matthew were alone on that island. Are you claiming that your scars were self inflicted? '\_\_

\_'No. We weren't alone,' Oliver replied flatly. 'I didn't want to talk about what happened to us on the island.'\_\_

\_'Why not? '\_\_

\_'Because the people that were there tortured us.' Lance and Laurel both looked at him in shock.\_\_

\_'Have you killed anyone? '\_\_

\_Oliver fell silent and swallowed hard. Finally he said softly, 'Yes.' Lance's gaze slid to his daughter in satisfaction, but it died as Oliver continued, 'When I asked your daughter Sara to come on my father's yacht with me. I killed your daughter.' As Laurel and her father sat in stunned silence, Oliver removed the leads from around his arm, stood, and left the room.\_\_

\_When the door had closed behind him, the tech said tentatively, 'I'd have to study the data, but just eyeballing it, he's telling the truth.'\_\_

\_'Can I assume that you'll be recommending Mrs. Spencer to drop all charges against my clients?' Laurel asked stiffly as she rose.\_\_

\_'No,' her father said. 'I know a guilty man when I see one. He is guilty, whether you can see it or not.' Laurel did not reply as she stormed out of the room.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>By this point everyone in the room, with the exception of Ra's, was glaring at Quentin. He shifted uncomfortably under the weight of their stares. It was Sara's glare that cut him deepest, and he knew he fully deserved it.<p>

"Did you have to provoke him so?" his younger daughter demanded.

"Sara -"

"Don't, Dad. Don't try to justify yourself."

\* \* \*

><p><em>That evening the party was in full swing at the mansion as Oliver came outside in his faux prison uniform and leaped up on the makeshift stage. Matthew looked on from the doorway. The music stopped as the partygoers turned to Oliver. 'Hi, everybody!' he shouted. The crowd roared back. 'I'm very touched that you came to celebrate with me before I am sent up the river.' Everyone laughed. 'Closest neighbors are six miles away, so don't worry about the noise. Actually, on second thought, let's wake those losers up!' Cheers erupted as the music resumed. Lance looked on, disgusted by the scene.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>The cop grunted in disgust. Joe gave Oliver an incredulous stare before shaking his head. "Were you like this before the <strong>Gambit, <strong>Queen?" he demanded. Oliver shifted in his seat but said nothing.

\* \* \*

><p><em>As Oliver jumped down from the stage and walked past Diggle, the bodyguard muttered, though not without some amusement, 'If you think this is what prison's like, you are in for a rude awakening.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Henry turned to Oliver and said carefully, "Mr. Diggle is right. You do not have any idea what prison is like, especially Iron Heights." Oliver stared at the man for a moment, then nodded silently.<p>

"I suppose you're right, Dr. Allen."

\* \* \*

><p><em> The three of them reentered the house and went upstairs to Oliver's bedroom. 'Mueller's car has been parked in the warehouse district of the Glades for forty-five minutes,' Oliver said as he handed Diggle his phone.<em>

\_'Yeah, that's a good place for an arms deal,' Diggle said as he examined the GPS map before handing the phone back to Oliver. 'OK, since this is going down tonight, what do we do, drop a dime on



Mueller with the cops?'

'No, the men in the hoods - or at least one of them. He's going to stop them,' Matthew replied.

'Neither of you can leave the house,' Diggle pointed out.

'It doesn't have to be me or Matt in the hood,' Oliver clarified.

Diggle stared at them before giving a disbelieving chuckle. 'That's why you threw this ridiculous party? So you have a hundred witnesses placing you here at the house while I'm supposed to be across town dressed as a vigilante?'

'We thought that it was going to be good enough just for you to be seen in the hood,' Oliver stressed as Diggle paced angrily. 'We didn't count on Mueller showing up and we didn't count on the possibility that the Glades could be flooded with machine guns.' Diggle only shook his head. 'Look. I promise, it was never our intention to put you in harm's way,' Oliver tried to placate him.

'Oliver, I didn't think joining your crusade was ever going to be risk free. I just don't like being played. Now you might have gotten used to lying to everyone else in your life, but I'm the one guy you don't lie to,' he said firmly, a trace of anger creeping into his voice.

Oliver took a breath. 'You're right. I'm sorry.' Diggle said nothing as he brushed past them.

'So are we going to jail?' Matthew asked resignedly.

Diggle turned back and sighed. 'No, man. I got to stop an arms deal.'

\* \* \*

><p>Felicity laughed. "I knew it!" She grinned at Diggle, who merely rolled his eyes.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Queen Consolidated, the ring of his phone interrupted Walter as he worked. He picked up the receiver and said, 'Hello?'<em>

'Mr. Steele, I'm sorry to bother you, sir,' the voice on the other end of the line replied. 'This is Mike Vogel down in security. But I have some sad news for you. The company's head of security, Josiah Hudson, was in a car accident tonight. He's dead, sir.'

Walter replaced the receiver when the call ended, stunned by what Vogel had reported.

\* \* \*

><p>"Damn," Barry muttered. "Someone's certainly tying up loose ends."<p>

"And I'm certain I know who that person was," Walter said icily, fixing Malcolm with a harsh glare. The other man only smirked.

"If anyone gets in my way, Walter, they will regret it. \_Anyone," \_he added as he deliberately glanced in Oliver and Matthew's direction.

"Malcolm!" Moira interjected. Malcolm shook his head.

"Moira, I've always seen Oliver as a son, but I will \_not \_be gentle with him should he get in my way."

"What the hell, Merlyn?" Eddie snapped, but Malcolm ignored the cop's rebuke, settling back in his chair as barbed glares were thrown in his direction.

\* \* \*

><p><em>After Diggle left, the brothers went to Robbie's room. A few minutes later Oliver left Matthew and Robbie alone and went back downstairs, through the foyer, only to pause as Laurel walked into the mansion and glanced around with a bemused smile. 'Hello. Do we have a legal meeting or something? Because I have friends over.'

\_ 'Do you think maybe you can tear yourself away from this inappropriately themed rave for a couple minutes?' she asked dryly. Together they went upstairs to his bedroom. 'Wow. I can't remember the last time that I've been in this room,' Laurel remarked.\_

\_ 'I can. Halloween, 2005. We were getting ready for Tommy's party.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>The twins burst into laughter, prompting raised eyebrows from both Laurel and Oliver.<p>

Sara grinned in amusement. "You have to admit, sis, the fishnets were horrible, but amusing at the same time." Tommy choked back laughter as Quentin Lance rolled his eyes.

"I still don't know what you were thinking, Laurel," the cop grumbled.

"Hmm - I wonder," Sara mused, a wicked glint in her eyes as she turned and called, "Any chance those photos are preserved on the Watchtower's database, Mr. Jordan?"

Before the superhero could reply, Laurel warned, "Don't you even think about it, Sara."

"Oh, come on," Barry teased. "I'd like to see the photos."

"No, you wouldn't, Barry," Laurel retorted. Cisco, Ronnie, and Roy began to laugh.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Ah, yes, I wore those horrible fishnets,' she replied as she set her purse down. Oliver closed the door.<em>

\_ 'I thought you looked good,' he said. She tried to suppress a smile.\_

\_ 'Listen,' she said as she turned to him, 'I just wanted to come by and apologize for my father's behavior today. During the polygraph.'\_

\_ 'You don't have to apologize for him. He has a right to feel any way that he wants,' he replied.\_

\_ 'It wasn't just Sara, Ollie.'\_

\_ 'What do you mean?'\_

\_ 'After Sara died, my father threw himself into his work. I think that's part of the reason I'm an attorney,' she admitted. 'He ran to the law and I followed. But my mother couldn't. So she left him. Left us.' Oliver sighed.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara closed her eyes, trying to hold back the tears. "Are you all right, beloved?" Nyssa asked in concern, gently touching the younger woman's arm. Sara opened her eyes and managed a faint smile as she clasped Nyssa's hand.<p>

"I'll be fine, Nyssa." The Heir to the Demon didn't look convinced, but opted not to press the issue. Sara took a deep breath and said, "Dad, there's something you and Laurel need to know." Both of them turned to her with confused looks. Sara continued, "The day the \*\*Gambit \*\*left, Mom came home early and saw me packing."

"She what?" Laurel sputtered. Quentin stared at Sara incredulously, unable to believe what he was hearing. Dinah had \_known?\_

"She never told us," he said hoarsely. "Why did she never tell us?"

Sara sighed. "She tried to convince me not to go with Oliver on the \*\*Gambit, \*\*because she knew it would hurt both of you. I resisted, told Mom I should be able to follow my heart like she once did. Eventually she gave in and told me to go with Oliver." She shook her head and turned away from her father and sister. "I wish I had listened to her."

The youngest Lance's revelation shocked both her father and sister, for they now felt they understood why Dinah had left Starling after the yacht went down. \_Oh, Dinah, \_Quentin thought wearily, \_why didn't you tell me? \_The Detective knew, however, that he was as much to blame as his ex-wife was, for he had made no effort to help her through her own grief, instead throwing himself into his work - and the bottle. If he had taken even a few hours to talk with her, then maybe he would have learned this sooner and Dinah's own guilt wouldn't have pushed her away from him and Laurel.

Laurel was shaken by what she had heard and ashamed at how she had treated her mother since the divorce. She had always resented Dinah

for moving to Central City, but now she understood why - her mother felt she was responsible for Sara's presumed death by encouraging her to go on the \*\*Gambit, \*\*just as her father felt he was responsible because he and Sara had never been close.

Oliver was deeply surprised by what Sara had shared, for she had never even hinted on Lian Yu that Dinah had known about the trip. He looked at Quentin, saw the guilt ridden look on his face, and sighed heavily. \_Looks like he and Mrs. Lance blame themselves too for what happened. Perfect.\_

Caitlin Snow knew she would have her work cut out for her if she could persuade the Lances to open up about their family life.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Look, I'm not trying to tell you this to make you feel bad, or worse,' Laurel continued. 'I just - I really want you to understand him.'<em>

\_He shook his head slowly. 'Why don't you hate me? You should.'\_

\_ 'I did. For so long, I did, Ollie. But after today, I realized that I was so focused on what happened to my family that I didn't even stop and wonder what could have happened to you or Matthew.' She was on the verge of tears. Oliver closed his eyes as he breathed in, then out, trying to calm himself. 'I didn't know about the torture, or your scars. What happened to you on that island was far more than you deserved. And I was wrong that I didn't ask you before, but I'm asking you now. I need to know. I need to see,' she pleaded.\_

\_ 'Are you sure?' Oliver asked quietly.\_

\_ 'Yes,' she said softly.\_

\_ Oliver unfastened the buttons on his shirt. Laurel reached out and slowly pulled the fabric aside, revealing the livid scars on his chest. She gasped. 'How did you survive this? '\_

\_ 'There were times when I wanted to die.' She looked at him, tears shimmering in her eyes. 'In the end there was something I wanted more.' \_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Surely they wouldn't - <em>Quentin thought, then his eyes widened as the two proceeded to do exactly that.

\* \* \*

><p><em>They both leaned forward and their lips met. The kiss deepened as their hands snaked behind each others' heads. For several seconds they were lost in each other, their desire evident - until Laurel pulled away, gasping. 'No.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Iris groaned in disappointment and Quentin glared at her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>She brushed past Oliver in her haste to flee the room. 'Laurel, you don't have to go.' The door opened and closed after her, leaving him alone in the room; he bowed his head sadly.<em>

**\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\***

\_Oliver hung limply from the pole, his eyes closed as he tried to gather his strength. Blood oozed down his shirt from the gash in his chest. 'Amazing,' Fyers said softly. Oliver forced himself to open his eyes, glaring weakly at the man. 'You have resolve I didn't give you credit for.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>With the exception of Talia and Dusan, everyone in the party - even Ra's and Nyssa - was surprised at the fact that Fyers' torture had not succeed in breaking either brother.<p>

"You're stronger than I thought, Oliver," Eddie said finally as he turned to the younger man. "I seriously expected you to crack when that merc was threatening Matthew."

"I came close," Oliver admitted quietly. "But then I thought, what kind of man would I be if I sold Yao Fei out just to keep Matthew from getting hurt? Wintergreen might have kept torturing him anyway. I wanted to protect my brother, that's true, but I also felt a sense of loyalty to Yao Fei for saving our lives. I couldn't choose between them."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Or perhaps they truly don't know anything. We should put them out of their misery.'<em>

\_An instant later someone burst into the tent, sending Fyers sprawling as he was about to leave. The figure - Yao Fei - swiftly loosed two arrows, severing the bonds that held the brothers to the poles. They both fell to the ground. Yao Fei loosed a third arrow at the merc - but the man caught it a bare millimeter from the mask's left eye slit, bending the arrowhead back. He drew his sword and engaged Yao Fei. The fight was brutal - until Yao Fei gained the upper hand, flipping the merc onto his back. The man was up again in an instant, however, and the fight resumed, the two trading blows with their fists as well as their weapons. Yao Fei sent the merc to the ground once more, then rushed to the brothers and hustled him out of the tent just as the merc regained his feet.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirira breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank God Yao Fei knew where you were." Oliver nodded, his expression grim.<p>

"We owed him our lives."

Matthew huffed lightly. "That wasn't the last time we tangled with Edward Fyers. He eventually got his just deserts, but it was too long coming, in my opinion."

"So you killed him?" Cisco asked curiously.

"Yes," Oliver replied flatly.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>\*\*

\_At the Starling City docks, Mueller and a few of his men met with several gangbangers from the Glades. 'It's an M249 machine gun,' he told them, taking the weapon from one of his men to show them. 'Gas powered, air cooled, fires up to eight hundred rounds per minute.' He tossed the gun to a young teen, who whistled in admiration as he looked it over. Then the lights went out. 'We need to move, now!' Mueller snapped. He grabbed the gun.\_

\_'What are you doing?'\_

\_'Get out of here! Move! Let's go!'\_

\_They started to scatter - and the Emerald Archer swept in. He clamped one of the gangbangers in a headlock as tires squealed a short distance away. A second later the teen slumped to the ground as Diggle stood over him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew grinned at the bodyguard. "Good work." Diggle chuckled, not quite able to believe he had been successful.<p>

"Same here," Roy added.

"You surprise me, Mr. Harper," Malcolm remarked. "I would have thought you would be more concerned for your friends." The disdain was clear in his tone.

Roy scowled at the businessman. "I grew up in the Glades and was a gangbanger, yes, but some of the lowlifes, like the ones Mr. Diggle took down, are pure scum. They had no morals or integrity. Despite what you may think, Mr. Merlyn, not all of us in the Glades are like the man who murdered your wife."

Malcolm stared at Roy for a long moment before he finally said, "How did you guess?"

"I was only a child when your wife was murdered, but it was common knowledge in the Glades. When Mr. Curry introduced you, I knew who you were." He looked at Tommy then. "Like you, Tommy, I know the pain of losing a parent in the Glades. My father was knifed to death after an illegal weapons deal gone wrong when I was only six."

Tommy nodded. "I'm sorry, Roy."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Moira entered Walter's office at QC. He sighed and clasped his hands together as she came up to the desk.<em>

\_'I'm not accustomed to being summoned to the office in the middle of the night.' She dropped her purse into a chair and folded her arms. 'Well, what was it that was so important that I had to race down

here? '\_

\_'I found the **\*\*Queen's Gambit, \*\***Moira,' he replied without preamble. She stared at him in shock. 'I know you secretly had the boat salvaged. I wanted to move it to a more secure location before confronting you about it. In fact, I sent Josiah Hudson to the warehouse for precisely that purpose. But he died mysteriously in a car accident.' Moira shook her head as she sat down, unable to believe what she was hearing. 'There's something else, too.' She looked up. 'Matthew was with me when I found the yacht.' \_

\_'Dear God,' she breathed, a horrified expression flitting across her face. 'How could you, Walter? '\_

\_He held up a hand. 'Don't, Moira. I assure you, if I had had any idea beforehand what we would find, I would not have asked Matthew to go with me.' He leaned forward. 'Do you have any idea what it was like for him to see the wreck of the **\*\*Gambit \*\***on the warehouse floor, to know that his father had been murdered? He was shaken, Moira, badly. I could see it in his eyes; he was reliving that night over again.' She closed her eyes, unable to hold back the tears.\_

\_'He can't tell Oliver or Thea.' Her voice was almost a whisper.\_

\_Walter shook his head. 'The choice is his to make, and you can't stop him, Moira. It is his right, if he wishes, to tell Oliver. As for Thea, I suspect that Matthew will choose not to tell her, to spare her the pain.' He sighed. 'I hope you now have a better understanding of why it is I've been so distant of late. It's very disconcerting to discover that the person with whom you share your home, your bed and your heart has been lying to you so convincingly, and I would be a fool not to consider all the things that you have told me were lies.' \_

\_'Walter, you're my husband. I -' she started, but he did not let her finish.\_

\_'Yes, I am,' he said coldly. They both stood.\_

\_'Walter, please,' Moira begged as he turned his back, 'You've got to stop looking into this, it's not safe. You'll be - you'll be upsetting people, people with influence. You are very far out of your depth.' He turned back to her, but his expression was cold.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Walter shook his head and said quietly, "Marriage is supposed to be built on trust, Moira, and you've lied to me many times over." He turned to look at her. "I don't know if I'll be staying in the mansion when we return."<p>

"Are you going to file for divorce?" she asked just as quietly.

He shook his head again. "Honestly, Moira, I don't know what I'm going to do." With that he turned back to the recording as Moira stared at him sadly, her thoughts in turmoil.

\* \* \*

><p><em>In his room, Oliver answered his cell phone when it vibrated. 'Man in the hood one, gangbangers zero,' Diggle said on the other end.<em>

\_A knock sounded at the door then. 'Hang on,' Oliver told Diggle before calling, 'Yeah?'

\_ 'Mr. Queen, if you're entertaining guests upstairs, should I have some drinks sent up?' Malcolm Merlyn's bodyguard called from the hallway as he loaded his gun.\_

\_ 'No,' Oliver called back. 'It's just me up here and I'm on my way back down.' He raised the phone back to his ear. 'Good job. Now get back here.' He opened the door as he ended the call - and found himself staring at the gun. The man lunged at him and Oliver grabbed his wrist, trying to force the gun away. They staggered deeper into the room, grunting. Oliver landed a blow that disarmed the man. Pounding footsteps could be heard down the hall. Matthew rushed through the doorway and tackled the killer from behind as Oliver grabbed him from the front. The three crashed into, then over, the love seat, sending it toppling, and into the coffee table, shattering it. The force of the impact weakened Matthew's grip on the man's throat, just slightly - but it was enough. The killer drove an elbow into Matthew's ribs. he grunted and fell back, jagged glass raking his ear and cheek. Dismissing him, the killer turned back to Oliver. They traded a few more punches before Oliver tossed the man across the room - straight to his gun. The assassin grabbed it, turned, and raised it to fire - and crumpled as he was shot from behind by Quentin Lance. The two men looked at each other in shock as Matthew rose, blood running down his face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tommy glared at his father. "Why?" he demanded coldly. Malcolm did not answer. Thea stared at Malcolm with a look of loathing in her eyes.<p>

Ra's noted that Al-Sa-Her's bodyguard had not lived, just as he had expected. He was mildly surprised, though, that it had been Quentin Lance and not Mr. Queen who finished him off.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Downstairs a short while later, all the party guests had left. Oliver and the twins were sitting on a couch, Oliver with an ice pack on his hand while an EMT was tending to the cuts on Matthew's cheek and ear. Tommy sat across from them in a chair. Lance paced as he talked on his phone.<em>

\_ 'Yeah. Yep.' The Detective hung up.\_

\_ 'How did you know I was in trouble?' Oliver asked curiously.\_

\_ 'Because when the guy was fighting you, he broke your ankle monitor,' Lance replied, surprising them.\_

\_ Moira and Walter rushed into the room. 'Are you all right?!' she asked, close to panic.\_



\_'We're fine,' Oliver replied calmly.\_

\_'Oliver -'\_

\_'Mom. I promise,' he interrupted. Moira looked at him, then at Matthew, noting the gash in his left cheek and the reddened gauze around his ear. She whirled on Lance. 'This is on you. By accusing my sons publicly, you've made them targets,' she practically snarled. Lance looked ashamed.\_

\_'Do you have any idea who attacked them?' Walter demanded.\_

\_'We haven't identified him,' Lance admitted. 'Though it must be someone with a grudge against the Hoods, obviously.' He knelt beside Matthew, the EMT moving aside to give him room. Lance unfastened the teen's ankle monitor and laid it on the table before moving to unfasten Oliver's.\_

\_'What are you doing?'\_

\_'I got a call from my lieutenant,' Lance replied. 'An arms dealer was attacked across town tonight.' He looked at Moira. 'By the vigilantes - one of them, at least. Multiple witnesses put him there. In light of that, all charges against your sons are being dropped.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that's one good thing to come out of this," Matthew muttered.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I'm truly sorry for what's happened to your family, Quentin,' Moira told him, then her tone hardened. 'But would you kindly get the hell out of my house?'

\_Quentin only nodded as he turned to leave. 'Mr. Lance,' Matthew called. The Detective turned back. 'Thank you.' Lance nodded once more before he left, leaving the family and Tommy alone.

><em>

\_The next day Moira stormed into Malcolm's office at Merlyn Global. 'Moira. Did we have an appointment?'\_

\_'No, but I decided to screw propriety after you tried to have my sons killed,' she snapped.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Several eyebrows shot up as everyone else looked at Moira, surprised by the language she had used, but the woman only shrugged.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>He drew a slow breath. 'I'm sure you understand, I was justified in suspecting your sons of being the vigilantes targeting

our associates. I had to take steps.'

'And now that you know your steps were taken in error, that Oliver and Matthew are not your enemy -' she replied.

Malcolm laughed. 'I offer my sincerest apologies.'

A tense silence fell for a few seconds before Moira said, 'I know you found out I had the yacht salvaged, just as I know you had Josiah Hudson killed.'

'Well, accidents tend to befall people who are too curious,' he replied.

'I've been the good soldier,' she said harshly. 'I've done everything you asked. But if any member of my family so much as gets a paper cut, I will burn your entire world to ashes.' She turned her back on Malcolm and left. He looked after her with a smile.

\* \* \*

"Well played, Moira," Malcolm said, an amused smile curling his lips.

\* \* \*

At the mansion Oliver picked through the debris in his room. He found the pouch of herbs on the floor and picked it up, remembering -

**\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_**

The three staggered back to the cave, Oliver and Matthew both groaning from the pain of their wounds. Yao Fei helped them lie down. 'I tell you, island dangerous, but you not tell them where to find me,' he said in admiration. 'You stronger than I thought.' He handed the herb pouch to Oliver. 'I lead them off, you stay. Remember, breathe. You breathe, you survive here longer,' he counseled before he walked out of the cave.

Matthew struggled to his feet. 'No! We're coming with you!' Seconds later, rocks fell to the ground outside the cave, sealing the entrance so they could not get out.

\* \* \*

"How could he do that?" Thea demanded. "How could he leave you there?"

"It was the only way to ensure that Fyers didn't find us," Oliver replied. "If we had gone with Yao Fei, we would've only slowed him down."

\* \* \*

2012

Oliver was deep in thought when his bedroom door opened. 'Rough party,' he said as he turned to greet Laurel.

\_'My father told me what happened. Are you OK?'\_

\_'Yeah, I'm fine.'\_

\_Laurel held up a bundle of papers as she came forward. 'These are your polygraph results. My father asked if you'd ever been to Iron Heights. It's the prison where one of the vigilantes saved me last week.' Oliver listened without expression. 'It's also where you and I went on our eighth grade field trip.' His jaw tightened. 'When you said that you had never been there, I thought maybe you were just nervous, or that you'd forgotten. But then I looked at your results, and there is a slight flutter in your answer to that question. And if you lied on one, you could have lied on others,' she finished.\_

\_'What happened to me being too selfish to be a masked crusader?' he asked coldly.\_

\_'Oliver! I saw your scars!' she exclaimed.\_

\_'Do you want to know why I don't talk about what happened to me there? Because if people knew, if you knew -' she looked up ' - you'd see me differently. And not as some vigilante guy. As damaged. I don't sleep. I barely eat. I can barely sign my name, let alone aim a bow and arrow.'\_

\_'After last night clearly we're still attracted to one another,' she said quietly. He looked down. 'Oliver. Nothing can ever happen between us.'\_

\_'I know,' he admitted. She handed him the results; he stood in the center of the room, head bowed, as she left.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Really," Sara said dryly, looking back and forth between her sister and Oliver.<p>

"Sara, don't," her father growled.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later, at the Lair, Diggle watched from his seat on a stool as the brothers carried the cases containing their bows to a table. 'So you lied to her. Or maybe you just gave her a version of the truth.'<em>

\_'I told her what she needed to hear, Diggle. She was too close,' Oliver rebutted.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The bodyguard snorted and eyed Oliver. "Of course you believe that."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Diggle stood. 'Sad thing is, I think you actually believe that.'<em>

\_In her bedroom Thea turned from the computer where she had been reading an article about her brothers. She picked up the Hozen, turning it over in her hand.\_

\_'I think things didn't go down exactly how you planned. You didn't count on so many people having questions, doubting you. You didn't think about what happens when you lie.'\_

\_In the mansion's foyer, Walter handed his suitcase to his driver. 'Thank you, Chris.'\_

\_Moirira appeared at the top of the stairs in her PJs. 'Walter?' He looked up at her. 'What is this?'

\_'Especially when you lie to the ones you love the most.'\_

\_'Business trip. I've decided it's long overdue for me to inspect our holdings in Melbourne.'\_

\_Moirira's expression showed that she realized all too well why he was leaving. 'And how long will you be?'

\_'I don't know,' he said before he walked out of the mansion, leaving Moirira staring after him sadly.\_

\_'When you were stuck on that island plotting your grand plan to save the city, I don't think you stopped to consider the effect it would have on the people in your life.'\_

\_In a bar, a drunk Quentin Lance was slumped over in his seat. Laurel entered and went to her father, slipping his arm around her shoulders. 'Let's go.' Lance tried to protest, but Laurel paid no heed as she helped him out.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin closed his eyes, not able to stand looking at Sara. He knew it would hurt her to see just how much her presumed death had affected him.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Or how it might hurt them,' Diggle finished.<em>

\_'You're wrong,' Matthew replied, looking Diggle in the eye. 'We think about it all the time. And just to be clear, not being able to tell our family the truth - it doesn't hurt anyone worse than it hurts us.' Oliver opened his case and retrieved his hood.\_

\_'Where are you going?' Diggle asked.\_

\_'Mueller still has to sell those guns and we have to stop him.'\_

\_'Oliver -' Diggle tried.\_

\_'He had his chance,' Matthew said coldly.\_

\_Later, at another warehouse on the docks, the vigilantes watched

silently from above as Mueller met with another gang from the Glades. The arms dealer growled, 'Twenty-eight crates, four guns in each crate, \$250,000 cash. Take it or leave it. That's the deal.' The buyer nodded in acceptance.\_

\_At that moment the Hoods leaped down from their perch and waded into Mueller's men. Within minutes all of them were down and Mueller himself disarmed. He raised his hands.\_

\_'Leo Mueller, you have failed this city,' the Scarlet Archer intoned, then loosed an arrow straight into Mueller's heart.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The Detectives shook their heads, but did not say anything to Matthew; they knew that if Leo Mueller had been left alive, he likely would have attempted to bring more machine guns into the Glades.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) Next chapter will be the first **\*\*Interlude\*\***; these will occur after every four or five episodes in Volumes One & Two, then after every six episodes in Volumes Three and Four. \_

\_2.) **\*\*Interlude I \*\***will also begin pulling the pieces together on the villains' side to set up the conflict between them and the **\*\*Justice League, \*\***so stay tuned.\_

## 7. Interlude I: Revelations and Reflections

### Interlude: Revelations and Reflections

Hal Jordan stood as the recording ended. "We'll stop there for tonight. Now, if you'll follow us to the observatory, there are a few people waiting to see you. After that you'll be shown to the visitors' wing." Without a word everyone stood and followed the Justice Leaguers from the auditorium, each one mulling over what he or she had seen and wondering what the next day's viewing would bring. Some were still miffed over the recent turn of events and intended to have strong words with (if not punch) their hosts, while others were thoughtful.

With Hal in the lead while Clark and Arthur brought up the rear to prevent anyone from wondering off, the visitors were led to the observatory, which was on the same level as the control room. The doors hissed open as Hal approached, revealing a star studded view of deep space outside the floor to ceiling window that formed the room's far wall. Earth was barely visible at one side of the view as it rotated slowly. The bank of lights in the ceiling were set at half strength; starlight coming through the window also provided illumination. As everyone's eyes adjusted to the dimness, they saw seven figures, all in civilian clothes, standing before the window. Six turned as the guests entered.

Moirah had to suppress a gasp as she saw her three younger children standing there, all twenty-one years older. Thea's hair was shorter

and she had a few lines around her eyes; stubble was visible on Matthew's cheeks and chin and silver strands threaded through his dark hair, but otherwise the twins were little changed from the two seventeen year olds who stood beside her. However, it was the sight of a twenty-five year old Robert Queen Jr that shook Moira the most. Her youngest son had grown into a tall, handsome man, bearing a striking resemblance to the twenty-six year old Oliver - except for the mask that covered the left side of his face. Moira felt a chill as she saw it, wondering why he needed the mask and hoping it didn't mean he had suffered some horrible injury. She glanced down at the four year old on her hip, then back to his future self. His eyes met hers and a small smile curled his lips. "Hello, Mom," he said quietly.

Like Moira, Joe was shocked to see his daughter. Though she was only forty-four years old, the older Iris had a look in her eyes that spoke of loss and unimaginable horror, but when she smiled he saw a glimpse of the girl he remembered. "Iris?" he said hesitantly as he took a step forward.

"It's really me, Dad," she said softly.

The other two who regarded the group were Felicity Smoak and Roy Harper. Unlike her younger self, Felicity was not wearing glasses and her blond hair was loose. Roy looked no different than his younger self except for the long scar that started just above his right eye and disappeared back into his hair.

Matthew was mildly shocked to see his future self - he had known it was coming, of course, but it was still a surprise. Thea, Iris, Felicity, and Roy, on the other hand, were all thoroughly stunned. Cisco's jaw dropped and Barry swallowed hard, trying to come to terms with the fact that he was seeing his foster sister's older self. Most of the others were also stunned, though Malcolm and Ra's looked intrigued.

Clark Kent cleared his throat, breaking the silence that had settled in the room. "I know this is a surprise to all of you, and you're thinking we're playing some kind of trick, but I assure you we are not. As Oliver guessed, several of you are still living today." He glanced back at the older heroes.

Joe couldn't help glaring at his future daughter. "Why would you allow yourself to get tangled up in this, Iris?"

"Call me Jacqueline so there won't be any confusion between me and her," the woman said calmly, tilting her head toward her younger self. "And to answer your question, Dad, the way my life unfolded didn't give me much of a choice."

"She's right, Joe," the last figure said as he turned to face them. "The main events that led each of us to where we are today are fixed points in time and cannot be altered, no matter how much we might wish it were so."

Moira's eyes widened. Oliver and the younger twins stared in shock. Standing before them was an older and more weary Bruce Wayne.

"Bruce?" Moira asked in disbelief. "Is it really you?"

A faint smile flickered across the man's face. "It is me, Aunt Moira." Seeing her skeptical look, he added, "When I left Gotham for my first year at Princeton, you told me Grandfather would have been proud." Moira nodded slowly; she knew without a doubt now that the man before her was Bruce Wayne, for that conversation had been only between the two of them.

"Bruce," she said quietly as she hugged him. "I thought you were dead."

"I had to leave Gotham for a while after the hearing. I'm sorry I never contacted you, but I felt it would be better if everyone believed I was dead."

She pulled back to look at him. "You know about Robert?"

He nodded grimly. "I didn't find out right away, but when I did -" He shook his head and glared at Malcolm. "I won't hurt you," he snarled, "but that doesn't mean I have to forgive you for murdering my uncle and nearly my cousins." Malcolm sneered at Bruce, not in the least cowed by his anger.

"Bruce, please," Hal interceded. "You can settle your issues with Merlyn later. Now is not the time." He gave the businessman a nasty glare, making it clear what he thought of him, before turning back to his friend. "There are more important matters at stake."

Bruce nodded and turned to his cousins. "It's good to see you again." His lips quirked in a smile as he looked at Oliver. "Quite a change from the kid who used to chase me around the manor, Ollie." The younger man glowered at him and Bruce laughed. "Ah, Oliver." His expression quickly turned serious. "You and I have both been through a trial by fire and came out changed for it."

"Are you a vigilante, Bruce?" Thea wanted to know.

The older man nodded. "I am."

Quentin Lance scowled in distaste. "You too?" he grumbled. "What is this turning into, a family business? I suppose you'll be telling us that Thea becomes a vigilante as well?"

"As a matter of fact, I did," the older Thea said quietly.

Thea's jaw dropped as she stared at her future self. Oliver and Matthew were likewise shocked, though Matthew's shock was tinged with anger - he had hoped that Thea would never become involved with their world, for it was far too dangerous. Moira couldn't suppress the flicker of fear she felt on hearing that.

"What is your vigilante name?" Cisco asked curiously.

"Batman," Bruce replied.

Roy snorted incredulously. "Batman? Sounds lame."

Bruce shook his head. "There's a reason I chose to be known as that, William." Everyone immediately understood that Bruce had addressed Roy by his middle name to distinguish him from his future self. Bruce

glanced briefly at his aunt before continuing. "Bats have always frightened me since I fell into a well when I was eight years old." Oliver nodded as he recalled that incident; it had been shortly before his uncle and aunt's deaths when he and his parents had visited Gotham for a week. Though he had been five years old at the time, he could still remembering running into the manor to find his father and Uncle Thomas - though fear had frozen his tongue and it had fallen to Rachel Dawes to explain what had happened. "When I began to operate in Gotham after my seven years away, I decided that my enemies should share my dread of bats."

"Cool," Cisco said, a tinge of excitement in his tone. Bruce gave the younger man a wry grin.

"What about you?" Moira asked, looking at her elder daughter, though she was not sure she wanted to hear the answer.

"I won't tell you precisely when I took up the mask, because you will see unfold in a week or two, but my code name is Artemis."

Malcolm chuckled. "So you're an archer just like Oliver and Matthew." She nodded. "What about you, Robbie?" Malcolm asked, turning his attention to the twenty-five year old.

"Call me Robert," the young man replied mildly. "To answer your question, Malcom - no, I am not a vigilante." Seeing the skeptical look on Quentin Lance's face, Robert added, "Don't assume this mask means I am one, for I assure you I am not."

"Matthew -" Laurel interrupted, only to pause as both the seventeen year old and the thirty-eight year old turned to her. "OK, this is strange."

"Please call me Brandon," the older said lightly. "So there won't be any confusion between me and mini-me -" his younger self glowered at that "- everyone can address him as Matthew and me as Brandon." A muffled snicker came from the older Thea; Brandon sent his twin a sideways look. "I don't know what you're laughing about, Mia."

"It's quite the irony; you didn't like being called Brandon when you were younger," she said with a smirk.

He rolled his eyes. "Oh, stop it, sister."

The older Roy smirked. "You know telling Mia to stop is useless."

Brandon's eyes narrowed. "Careful, Roy. You may be my brother-in-law, but I can still lay a beatdown on you." Roy only snickered.

"What?" the younger Thea sputtered. "You - you can't mean - I marry him!" She pointed a finger at the younger Roy, who glowered at her.

Bruce chuckled. "Yes, little cousin, the heiress to the Queen fortune married the street kid from the Glades." The younger Thea and Roy looked disgusted and horrified by this.

"Could be worse," the older Thea said with a sly grin. "I could have married Constantine instead."



"Oh, no!" Oliver, Matthew, and Brandon all chorused at the same time, glaring at her. Her smile widened.

"He's a particular kind of yummy."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Mia, will you give it a rest?" Brandon growled. The older Felicity and Robert were trying unsuccessfully to hide their laughter, while several of the visitors - in particular Barry, Iris, and Cisco - were doing the same.

"All right, all right," Arthur Curry interceded. "Mia, stop tormenting your brother." She smirked but said nothing more. "If those of you from Central City would follow me, as well as Miss Smoak, Mr. Diggle, and Mr. Harper, dinner is waiting in the cafeteria."

"A moment, Arthur," Jacqueline interceded. "I need to speak with my father." Joe raised a curious eyebrow, but followed her to the other end of the room, where a short and slightly tense conversation ensued. A minute later Joe rejoined the others.

"Dad, what was all that about?" his daughter asked.

He gave her a small smile and said, "I'll tell you later."

Those whom Curry had named threw curious looks at the rest, wondering why they were being asked to remain, but followed the man from the observatory.

"What's -" Thea started, but fell silent at a sharp gesture from Bruce. The group waited as the doors closed behind Hal Jordan and the others, then Brandon turned to Moira.

"There's something we need to talk about," he said seriously. Moira felt a sinking sense of dread - she had a pretty good idea what he meant.

"Brandon, no." Walter, knowing what was coming, took Robbie and the two went to the window to look out at the stars.

He shook his head. "No, Mom. Ra's has already guessed it. So has Nyssa." He glanced at the Demon's Head. "You have to tell them, and tell them now. Believe me, it will be a lot better if they hear the truth directly from you. When Mia and I found out, it tore our family apart, and we were just beginning the road to reconciliation when Slade murdered you." Moira closed her eyes at the reminder of her death.

"What are you talking about?" Tommy demanded.

"It concerns your father and Mom," Mia replied bluntly. Malcolm raised a curious eyebrow.

"How so, Mia?"

Brandon took a deep breath. "Thea, Matthew, I won't say how, but when Mia and I were nineteen, we discovered that Robert Queen was not our father." They stared at him in disbelief. "Malcolm is our father - your father." Moira sighed in resignation and turned away from

Brandon.

Oliver gritted his teeth, trying to suppress the urge to lash out at his mother; first it was revealed that she was having an affair with Malcolm, the man responsible for his father's death, now it turned out that it had begun even before the \*\*Gambit \*\*went down? Tommy looked back and forth between his father and Moira, shock and confusion on his face.

"What?" Quentin sputtered. Laurel and Sara were both stunned.

Talia and Dusan were inwardly chiding themselves for not having made the connection earlier. Dusan also had a niggling feeling at the back of his mind, like a half remembered memory he couldn't summon into focus, as he looked at Malcolm. He was certain he had seen the man somewhere before, but could not recall where.

Malcolm, for his part, was caught completely off guard by the revelation. Never, in his wildest dreams, had he thought he would hear this. \_My children. My son - my daughter. \_

"When?" Tommy finally asked after several moments of awkward silence, looking not at his father, but Moira. She sighed again, knowing there was nothing she could say now except the truth.

"It was about a week after your mother's funeral, Tommy. Malcolm came over one day when Robert was off with one of his mistresses - he didn't say where he was going, but I knew. We comforted each other." She looked at the twins, who were still reeling from this news. "When I found out I was pregnant, I knew Malcom, not Robert, was the father. I don't think Robert ever suspected you weren't his."

"He knew, Mom," Mia said quietly.

"What?"

"He knew about Malcolm, but to him it didn't matter. We were as much his children as Oliver was, and a blood test wasn't going to change that."

"You lied to me, Moira," Malcolm said sharply - he could not believe she had kept this from him. "For seventeen years, you lied to me."

Moira looked him straight in the eyes. "And why should that surprise you, Malcolm? You were barely a father to Tommy when you returned to Starling after two years away. Is it any wonder that when I saw how you were acting with him, I made the decision to withhold the truth from you? For all his faults, Robert did act like a father to Oliver and the twins. He took Tommy under his wing when you ignored him."

Malcolm shook his head. "You still should have told me."

"And us," Thea hissed, glaring at her mother. "How could you do that? Do you have any idea what I'm feeling right now?"

"Thea -"

"You lied to us!" the girl shouted, her voice cracking. "For years

you lied to me and Matthew! How many more secrets are you hiding, Mom?" Moira sighed and turned to look at her younger son. Matthew had said nothing so far, but the betrayed expression in his eyes cut her deeper than Thea's ire did. Without a word he turned and stormed out of the observatory. Thea gave her mother an icy glare before following her twin out.

Without warning, Tommy wheeled on his father and sent his fist flying toward Malcolm's chin. Malcolm easily intercepted the blow and twisted Tommy's hand down to his side. Tommy glared at him before he turned and stalked out.

"Well done, Mom," Oliver said, his tone tinged with anger. With that he, too, left the observatory. Moira sighed and shook her head.

Malcolm turned to look at the future versions of his children. "You didn't reveal you were my children because you were looking for a family relationship," he said knowingly.

"No," Mia replied. "You were going to use my younger self to control and manipulate Ollie and Matt." That brought angry glares directed at Malcolm from Talia, Dusan, and the Lances.

"And now I won't?" he asked.

"No," she said confidently. Malcolm couldn't argue with that. "And this way, when Slade comes, you'll be more inclined to help."

"I'd reveal a lot if I did that."

Mia smirked. "I wouldn't worry too much about that by ... tomorrow?"

"What do you mean?" he asked warily.

"You'll see," the older Felicity replied calmly.

\* \* \*

><p>The evening meal was a rather quiet affair, as most of them were subdued after the day's events. Oliver and Matthew sat aloof from the others with Talia and Dusan, though Sara, Nyssa, Thea, and Tommy later joined them. Moira, Walter, Joe, Henry, Quentin, and Stein sat together, talking quietly. The rest of the younger crowd sat together as well, while Ra's and Malcolm sat alone. Bruce joined them, though the other Justice Leaguers did not.<p>

Once dinner was finished, Joe took a deep breath and went to his daughter. "Iris." She turned to him with a smile that disappeared on seeing his solemn expression.

"What is it, Dad?" she asked worriedly.

"There's something I need to tell you. Barry and Henry too." He knew Barry wouldn't be able to keep this secret from Henry for long, so he opted to go ahead and have him present when he told Iris the truth.

Joe led the other three out of the cafeteria and down the corridor.

Once they rounded a corner and were out of sight, Joe sighed and turned to his daughter. "Iris, there's something I should have told you long ago." She looked at him in confusion as he continued, "When you mentioned your mother to Thea earlier - what you told her wasn't the truth." Iris' expression turned disbelieving. "Your mother, she -" Joe paused for a second, then finished, "she's still alive."

Barry laid a steadying hand on Iris' shoulder as she tried to process what she was hearing. Henry eyed Joe in mild surprise.

Meanwhile Matthew, Talia, Dusan, Nyssa, and Felicity were summoned back to the observatory, where, to their surprise, they found Brandon and the older Felicity waiting for them. Once the doors had closed, Brandon said without preamble, "The reason we asked you to come back here is because there is something you must know, something that concerns all of you." He drew a slow breath. "As you have probably guessed, Talia, you and I did marry several months after my return to Starling City." Talia only nodded; she had indeed guessed that earlier. "However -" his voice shook slightly now " - we were married for only three years before you died."

Nyssa inhaled sharply at that as Felicity turned pale and Dusan stared searchingly at Brandon. Matthew was left reeling by the news; it felt as if someone had ripped his heart in two. He reached for Talia's hand, needing to reassure himself that she was with him now. She laced her fingers through his but said nothing as she waited for Brandon to continue. "Your death was the indirect result of an assassination attempt on Oliver - I won't go into the details because you will see it play out in a few weeks. What's more important for you to know now is that you, Dusan, married Felicity a few years later." The IT tech looked at Brandon, then her older self, in utter shock before turning her gaze to Dusan. Matthew's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

\_Interesting, indeed, \_Nyssa thought as she glanced at the blond woman. She had to admit she could not see what would possibly draw her brother and Felicity Smoak together, but then the ways of love were often mysterious.

Brandon continued, "You, Dusan, were murdered two and a half years ago - again, I won't tell you how or why." Felicity gasped and looked at her older self, who nodded sadly. Dusan closed his eyes and shook his head.

"Felicity and I wanted to tell you this in private for a specific reason - that reason being that we have been married for the last year." He extended his hand, a faint flicker of starlight glinting off the ring on his finger. "We felt you deserved to know as soon as possible what happened to the four of you in this future, and we brought you in, Nyssa," he added, "so that you would understand as well."

"Make no mistake, Felicity," the older woman said calmly to her younger self, "I loved Dusan and Brandon loved Talia. We will never forget that. But just because we lost them didn't mean we couldn't find love again."

\* \* \*

><p>As the group retired for the night, each one wrestled with his or her own questions and fears.<p>

Oliver stared out the window of his room at the vista of deep space, trying to find a sense of calm after the harrowing day. He was angry and confused - angry that so many of his deepest secrets and feelings had been revealed, but still confused by the purpose for this gathering. He instinctively knew there was more going on here that their hosts were telling them, and he had noticed that despite Hal Jordan's confirmation that he was still alive in this future, his older self had not been one of those they met earlier, which begged the question: where was he right at this moment?

Matthew slept restlessly throughout the night, troubled by recurring nightmares of his torture at Wintergreen's hands. The dreams had not plagued him for the last year, but seeing the incident unfold on screen earlier had brought the memories back. He woke several times breathing heavily and covered with a fine sheen of sweat, the sheets tangled around his body.

Joe was still angry over the entire situation, but was starting to realize that there was apparently more going on here than they were being told. His animosity toward the brothers was weakening, especially after seeing how they had been tortured in the last recording. He felt a sense of relief, however, that he had finally told Iris the truth about her mother.

Iris was still stunned over her father's revelation, but as she thought over what he had said she could understand why he had kept the truth from her for so long - knowing that her mother was a drug addict would have been difficult for her to accept when she was younger. She had to suppress a shiver at the recollection of her father's words:

\_"The last time she overdosed, Iris, you called me to say your mother had passed out. I came home to find her on the couch and you close to the open flame on the stove. After that, something had to be done. So your mother left, and I couldn't tell you the truth, not then, so I told you she had died. Perhaps it was wrong of me to do that, but I wanted to spare you the pain." \_

Henry had kept a more open mind; like Joe, he was not very happy about what was occurring, but knew there was a reason for it.

Caitlin had gone to the Watchtower's medical bay to familiarize herself with the equipment so she could do X-Rays on Matthew Queen's fingers the following day - and had encountered her older self, who was, apparently, the station's Chief Medical Officer. Once the initial shock had passed, Caitlin had spoken briefly with her future self, but the conversation filled her with foreboding. When asked where Ronnie was - as Caitlin had thought he would be close by, yet she hadn't seen him - her older self shook her head. \_"It's complicated, Caitlin." \_

That short statement - and the melancholy look she had seen in the older woman's eyes - was what kept Caitlin awake now, staring at her bedroom ceiling. She wondered if she should tell Ronnie about the conversation. \_Will I lose him in the future? \_she thought with a shiver.

Quentin was fairly baffled by all he had seen, but in the absence of alcohol he was able to examine his actions in the recordings and felt nothing but shame. In the morning, he vowed, he would offer Oliver an apology. He was doubtful as to whether the man would accept it, but he knew he owed it to Queen - and Matthew as well. His conversation with Caitlin Snow after dinner still echoed through his mind.

"I'm ashamed to admit this," he had told the woman reluctantly, "but I'm starting to realize what a fool I've been. All these years, I hated Queen for dragging Sara along on the yacht. It was easy to pin all the blame on him, but the truth is, I blamed myself too. I kept thinking, maybe if Sara and I had been closer, she would have told me about the trip and I could have convinced her not to go. After Moira told us Sara had been aboard, everything just fell apart." He sighed and rubbed his forehead. "I threw myself into my work - and the bottle."

Caitlin leaned forward. "Detective Lance, you can rebuild your relationships with your daughter and Oliver, but it will take time, and will not be an easy process. All of you have been badly hurt by the events of the last five years. You're carrying around a lot of baggage that you will have to deal with. The most important step, right now, would be for you to curb your drinking."

He had nodded and admitted, "You're right. There were times today that I found myself wishing I had a bottle, but without it I was able to see where I was acting like a fool in those recordings."

Moira was haunted by the image of her gravestone, the knowledge that her youngest son had, in this timeline, been orphaned at the age of six. She was also troubled by the fact that Thea had apparently joined Oliver and Matthew in their crusade; she was not too pleased with that prospect.

Thea was still trying to process all that she had learned. Malcolm Merlyn her father, Tommy her half brother, herself married to Roy Harper? She cringed as she recalled that she had once thought Tommy hot.

Walter felt betrayed by his wife. He was infuriated (though he had not shown it) at the revelation of her affair with Malcolm Merlyn. Four years, even after he had married her? Not only that, but it seemed they were involved in some kind of plot that did not bode well for Starling City. He was seriously considering filing divorce papers on their return, but there was one consideration that kept him from doing that outright: Robbie. The boy needed a stable father figure in his life. So did Thea, even though she was almost an adult.

Malcolm maintained his calm until he was alone in his room, then he whirled and punched the wall beside the door. Pain flared in his hand, but he ignored it and punched the wall again and again, until his knuckles were bloody and his hand was throbbing.

His son. Matthew was his son, and he had nearly killed him by targeting Robert. Caused Matthew's separation from his twin sister, his own daughter. He recalled the looks of disbelief of Thea and Matthew's faces when Mia revealed the truth; it echoed what he felt in his heart. How could he have been so blind not to see it years ago?

Tommy was still stunned over the fact that the twins were his half siblings, but it changed little for him, as he had always seen them as younger siblings. It was his father, however, that preoccupied his thoughts. He was beginning to realize that he did not really know Malcolm Merlyn at all. His father had always been cold and distant since his mother's death, but Tommy had not expected to hear that he was responsible for Robert Queen's death and was involved with Mrs. Queen in some kind of plan for Starling City.

\* \* \*

><p>They were not the only ones unable to sleep that night.<p>

Iris West-Allen was drained by the day's events. Seeing the twenty three year old version of her missing husband had proved harder than she thought it would be. It had taken all her resolve not to leave the observatory the moment she set eyes on him. The memories had flashed through her mind ...

\_The grin on his face when he saw her coming down the aisle in her wedding dress ...\_

\_The look in his eyes as he held Nora, and later Henry, for the first time as Iris watched, exhausted but happy ...\_

\_The fateful day of the battle with the Reverse Flash - the two speedsters fighting in the streets of Central City as Oliver, Matthew, and Wally closed in ...\_

\_then the flash of light, so brilliant it had blinded them all ...\_

\_when they could see again, no trace of the Reverse Flash or Barry ...\_

After tossing and turning for several hours, plagued by nightmares, Brandon rose and went to the window to stare out at the stars as he brooded.

Finally, knowing he would not be able to sleep again, he checked the chrono on the wall. It was 6:30 AM, still an hour until sunrise (such as it was considered) on the Watchtower. He went to the bed and leaned over to gently kiss Felicity on the forehead; she stirred slightly but didn't wake. He left their quarters and headed down the corridor to the main gym. The room was dark and silent as he entered, which was surprising since Clark or Wally were usually in here by this time of morning. He hit the panel to bring the lights up before moving to the sword rack to take his usual blade. Stripping off his shirt, he tossed it aside and went to the mats in the center of the gym to begin his exercises.

Only a few minutes had passed before he paused and called out, "What are you doing here?"

"Felicity contacted me and said you were troubled all night," his father said as he strode into the circle of light around the mats.

"So you thought you'd come up here to offer platitudes?" There was a

faint bite in Brandon's tone as he turned to face Malcolm Merlyn.

His father arched an eyebrow. "Do you think so little of me, still?"

"You're my biological father. There's no denying that," Brandon replied bluntly. "But considering that you managed to thoroughly mess up Tommy's life, then Mia's - which impacted mine, Oliver's, and everyone else's, by the way - you still have a long way to go to regain my trust, despite the fact that you turned on Savage and told the Council what you know."

Malcolm shook his head. "I care about you and Mia, Brandon. I always have."

"Then you have a funny way of showing it," Brandon shot back. He sighed. "Well, you're here and I could use a sparring partner. What do you say?"

In answer Malcolm strode to the sword rack and selected a blade before returning to the mats. Without a word Brandon raised his sword high and began to circle his father, who watched him calmly, his own blade down by his side.

\* \* \*

><p>As morning dawned, one by one the members of the viewing party straggled from their bedrooms into the common area.<p>

Dusan went to his older sister when he saw her enter with Sara and said quietly, "Nyssa, there's something I'd like to ask you." She tilted her head slightly, telling him to continue. "Oliver, Matthew, Talia, and I are going to spar later. Will you and Sara join us? I haven't sparred with you in years and I miss it."

Nyssa studied her brother for a moment, then nodded. "I would like that, Dusan." Talia joined them then.

Plucking up his courage, Cisco approached Oliver and Matthew; the trio were soon in deep discussion about the feasibility of the brothers using masks to conceal their faces, with Cisco excitedly outlining his ideas as the brothers listened and offered their own suggestions.

Thea, Roy, Barry, Iris, Laurel, and Felicity congregated near the window, idly speculating about what the day's viewing would bring.

Malcolm approached Moira and Walter and was soon in a tense, though friendly enough, conversation with Walter.

Caitlin, Ronnie, Henry, and Stein talked about STAR Labs, Harrison Wells, and even Iron Heights.

The cops and Diggle conferred in a corner while Ra's remained by himself, observing everything with a keen eye.

Tommy was the last to come in just before 8:00. At 8:15 Clark Kent arrived. "Breakfast will be served at 9. Brandon has requested that I



bring everyone to the main gym first."

On reaching the gym, the visitors were astonished to see a shirtless Brandon standing on a mat in the center of the room, facing an older Malcolm Merlyn. They traded blows with swift precision that would have been deadly had they not had the skill to pull back just in time. Brandon whirled and brought his blade down toward Malcolm's shoulder, but when the older man whipped his blade up to block, Brandon abruptly reversed the angle of his stroke, toward Malcolm's knee. Malcolm responded by kicking out with a foot, catching Brandon in the ribs. The younger man spun away with a grunt.

"They've been going at it for nearly two hours," Clark said in a low voice as the guests watched the spar.

"Do they do this often?" Moira asked worriedly, glancing from her son to his father.

"Not often," the Kryptonian replied.

"Why is Brandon so intense?" Matthew asked as he watched his older self.

"Because he had a nightmare last night. When that happens, the only way he can relax is by doing this." Everyone turned as Mia, Roy, Felicity, and Robert entered the gym. As she watched her brother, Mia continued, "He's had a rough time the last few days. Old memories. We all have them, of course, but I think it's hitting him harder than the rest of us." On the mats, the two had paused and were looking in their direction. Brandon's chest rose and fell as he breathed in, then out. Malcolm lowered his sword.

\* \* \*

><p>After the sparring session was finished, the group went to the cafeteria for a late breakfast. Following that they returned to the gym for a hour, where Oliver, Matthew, Talia, Dusan, Nyssa, and Sara engaged in their own sparring sessions on the mats; Barry, Cisco, and Tommy did a light track workout under Eddie's supervision; and Malcolm took advantage of the archery targets set up at one end of the gym to practice with the bow. The others watched the workouts and chatted quietly.<p>

Once the hour was up the viewing party returned to the auditorium. Bruce and Brandon were waiting outside the doors when they arrived; as Hal gestured the others in before him, the Red Arrow said in a low voice, "Only four today, correct?" Hal nodded grimly.

"Wally will be waiting out here and Clark will be inside, but it's still going to get tense. I'm not too worried about Ra's, but Quentin and Thea are likely to act rashly." Brandon returned Hal's grim look with one of his own before the two entered the auditorium. As the door shut behind them, Brandon stared thoughtfully for a moment before he turned to head down the corridor, silently hoping that the day would not be complete chaos. \_Oh, who am I kidding? \_he thought resignedly. \_Chaos is going to be the perfect word for the storm about to break.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Earth<strong>

In the central chamber of the fortress, the dark haired man leaned over the stone table where the maps were spread out, thoughtfully tracing the dot that marked Gotham City. He heard a familiar footfall behind him.

Bane did not turn as Deathstroke said without preamble, "The spy's reports were true - the Justice League has gathered Oliver Queen and Barry Allen's family, friends, and allies on the Watchtower." Footsteps echoed down the passageway and Ravager entered the chamber, his face dark with anger. "I have already sent a communication to Savage informing him so."

"Hmm," Bane mused. "It will give us a perfect opportunity. The viewing would take a few weeks, would it not?"

"It will. I think it best to strike before they have finished," Ravager said with a cruel smile.

"My thoughts exactly, but I do not wish to throw all our resources at them at once. No, we should stage several diversionary attacks to distract the Justice League, keep them off balance."

"Then when they least expect it, we attack the Watchtower," Bane added as he guessed where Deathstroke was going with this. "We should try to draw some of the Justice League to the surface at the same time - particularly the Batman," he spat in disdain.

"Superman and the Flash, too - I don't want them on the Watchtower when I target Thea Queen," Ravager said darkly.

"Is the serum ready?" Bane asked.

"Almost. A few more days, at least," Deathstroke replied.

"Your mother has personally selected the men who will take the injection," Ravager told him, "and they are willing. They were informed of the risk, but none backed down."

"Excellent." Bane poured three glasses of wine and handed one each to Deathstroke and Ravager. "Let's drink to taking vengeance on our enemies - Bruce Wayne and Oliver Queen."

Sinister laughter echoed through the fortress as the three men drank.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) A little dissatisfied with this, but hopefully it's not too much of a jumble.\_

## 8. Episode VI: Legacies

In the auditorium the party (sans Robbie, who had been coaxed to the station's playroom with the promise that his mother would come if he needed her) took their seats. Once everyone was settled, the first of

the day's recordings began.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Three men stormed into the Starling Trust Bank, with masks over their faces and AK-47's in their hands. One also carried a jackhammer on his back. The man in the lead, wearing an Ace of Spades mask, raised his weapon and fired several shots into the ceiling, sending customers and employees diving for cover. 'Get down! Everybody get down!' he shouted. 'Nobody lift their head, nobody gets hurt!' Unseen by the robbers, an employee pressed a button under the counter to trigger an alarm before she followed the others to the floor.<em>

\_'Get down! Get down on the floor right now!' the robber wearing the King of Spades mask roared.\_

\_Ace confronted the bank manager. 'You can't jackhammer into the safe,' the man told him levelly. 'It's too thick.' Ace struck the manager across the face, sending him sprawling.\_

\_'Shut up!' he snarled. He kept watch over the hostages as his compatriots went for the safe.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Eddie's eyes narrowed. "The Royal Flush Gang."<p>

"Who are they?" Matthew asked.

"The Royal Flush Gang has been operating in the western United States for the last three years," Eddie told him. "Usually hit two or three banks per city. First city they hit was Keystone." The Detective scowled darkly. "I hadn't joined the Keystone PD at that time, but I heard stories from the cops who were there when it happened. They hit three banks in one week, all in broad daylight. The KCPD tried to arrest them, but they managed to skip town."

"They surfaced again two months later," Quentin added. "Seems to be their method of operation: rob a few banks in one city, then lie low for a month or two before striking again." He scowled at the screen. "I'd hoped they would stay out of Starling."

Oliver studied the screen thoughtfully. He had a pretty good idea what would happen here, but decided to see how things played out.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Move, move!' King shouted.<em>

\_'We're through!' Jack of Spades exulted.\_

\_King looked back at Ace. 'Three minutes.' Ace checked his watch.\_

\_'Make it two.'\_

\_King and Jack ran into the open safe and began clearing money out.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Greedy fools," Henry muttered. "Why are they doing this?"<p>

"If the cops could catch them, maybe we'll find out," William snarked. Barbed glares from the Detectives greeted his comment.

\* \* \*

><p><em>One of the men on the floor slowly reached for his concealed ankle holster. The woman next to him noticed the movement. 'Are you trying to get us killed?' she whispered in panic.<em>

\_ 'Don't worry,' he reassured her, pulling his jacket back far enough to show her his badge. 'I'm a cop.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Stan Washington," Quentin said in recognition.<p>

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Cisco muttered. Barry nodded grimly; he, too, felt a sense of foreboding and hoped this wouldn't turn into a bloody mess.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Please don't do anything. I don't want to die. Please!'  
' she pleaded fearfully.<em>

\_ Unfortunately, the conversation drew Ace's attention. He strode over, looked down at the cop - and fired three shots into his back. The other hostages screamed in terror as the injured man lapsed into unconsciousness.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver growled angrily on seeing the injured cop. He could already tell Ace would be trouble for him and Matthew. His brother muttered grimly, "That guy needs a good blow on the head with my bow."<p>

Thea and Felicity screamed in shock.

"Son of a bitch!" Quentin shouted in rage. "You think you can get away with shooting a cop?!" Joe and Eddie glared at the man on the screen; an attack on one cop was an attack on them all. All three men had formed deep bonds with some of their fellow officers in their respective PDs and knew that if one of their friends were hurt, they would stop at nothing to bring the one responsible to justice.

Barry felt anger burning in his chest. Though he was only a CSI at the CCPD, he had come to know some of the officers rather well and hated the thought that they might get hurt. For once, he hoped that Oliver and Matthew would give these robbers the justice they deserved.

Iris and Laurel were both rattled by the scene, knowing that the injured cop could have easily been one of their fathers. Quentin, seeing his daughter's expression, whispered, "It's OK, baby," as he

wrapped his arm around her. Joe was similarly comforting Iris.

Sara, too, was stricken by the sight of the injured cop, but kept her emotions buried deep inside.

Ronnie's jaw tightened as he held an ashen Caitlin close. Cisco's usual goofy expression was gone; he glared coldly at the screen. The others were similarly outraged. Even Malcolm looked disgusted by Ace's actions, though Ra's and Nyssa betrayed no reaction beyond a tightening of their lips.

\* \* \*

><p><em>King stormed out of the safe. 'What the hell's going on?' he demanded as Ace rolled his victim onto his back to display the badge.<em>

\_ 'He was a freakin' cop,' Ace said, retrieving the badge and handing it to King.\_

\_ 'Enough throwing shots,' King snapped.\_

\_ The sound of sirens outside stopped them short. 'You hear that? Someone triggered the alarm!' Ace bellowed. Inside the safe Jack paused.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Good on whoever did that," Barry said harshly. "Maybe they'll finally be arrested."<p>

Ronnie shook his head. "I doubt it, Barry, but at least the cop will get medical attention."

"The next few hours will be critical for him," Henry said. "Even if the bullets went through, he may have suffered heart or lung damage."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Ace raised his gun, but King shoved it back down. 'Don't! That's it. Let's go.'<em>

\_ Outside the bank, the police were waiting with guns drawn and trained on the doors. 'Starling City Police Department,' Detective Hilton said through a megaphone. 'Lay down your weapons and come out with your hands up. Repeat, lay down your weapons and come out with your hands up.' Ace and King looked at each other for a moment before Ace regarded the woman on the floor near the injured cop. She looked back at him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait a minute ..." Cisco said.<p>

"What is it, Cisco?"

"They must have slipped someone inside." Cisco pointed at the screen. "See the way Ace and the woman are looking at each other? She's got to be involved somehow."

Quentin was about to make a sarcastic remark, but Matthew cut him off. "Actually, Cisco may be right. There definitely is something fishy about this."

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few minutes later, the front doors opened and the terrified hostages ran out. 'Hold your fire,' Hilton ordered as he lowered the megaphone. 'These are hostages. You take the hostages.' As several officers came forward to lead the hostages to safety, Hilton called, 'All units move in! Move in!' He sprinted up the steps into the bank, gun drawn and several officers trailing in his wake. As they entered the lobby, Hilton gestured to an officer to check on the injured cop's condition. He continued to the safe with the others, where they found a large hole cut into the floor.<em>

\_Some distance away, the robbers pulled themselves out of an open manhole next to a waiting van. 'Come here,' King snarled, roughly grabbing Ace's hand to pull him out. 'You shot a cop. This is not how we do things.'\_

\_Ace pulled off his mask. 'Me getting killed isn't how we do things either, is it? Is it?!' he snarled in frustration.\_

\_'Get in the van!' King ordered, pushing Ace into the van as he ripped off his own mask. Once he too was inside he shouted 'Go!' and the van sped off.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"It appears the Royal Flush Gang is a family gang," Dr. Stein said.<p>

Malcolm nodded. "I saw the resemblance between Ace and King, too."

\* \* \*

><p><em>In the Lair, a shirtless Oliver and Diggle were sparring with escrima sticks as Matthew looked on.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>The two men just shook their heads in mild amusement at the sighs of admiration from Felicity and Iris. Ronnie smirked as Caitlin kissed him, telling him that he was perfect in her eyes.<p>

"Hello, sexy," Iris murmured, gazing at Diggle approvingly. Joe rolled his eyes as Barry shifted in his seat.

"Mr. Diggle? Screw my brother, you can be my bodyguard instead," Thea said in admiration.

"I second that," Felicity interjected. Laurel nodded in agreement.

"Girls, get in line! He's gonna be my bodyguard," Iris exclaimed. She turned to Diggle. "Mr. Diggle, you wouldn't mind being my bodyguard, would you?" she asked, batting her eyelashes. Barry squirmed uncomfortably.

"I like to work for my paycheck, Miss West," Diggle replied. He managed to keep a straight face, though inwardly he was satisfied with the female attention he was getting.

Joe glared at Diggle. "I have a gun and a badge," he warned. "Don't go near my daughter or I will shoot you."

Diggle tossed the man a salute. "Yes, sir." Barry was looking queasy now.

Eddie laughed in amusement at the exchange between his fellow cop and the former solider. \_Joe must do that to all of Iris' boyfriends\_, he thought. Little did Eddie know that he would be part of that list later on.

By this point Iris was pouting. "Overprotective much?" she asked a sulking Barry.

"I'm a failure in life ..." Barry muttered, apparently not having heard Iris' question to him.

Several of the others stared at him in surprise. Henry shook his son lightly by the shoulder. "Barry," he said gently. "Snap out of it." The younger man lifted his head slightly but made no other response to his father's words.

"Is Barry going to be okay?" Cisco asked in concern.

'Yeah," Iris replied. "He just gets like that sometimes. I never understood why, though," she added with a frown.

"Oh," Caitlin said quietly. Ronnie gave her a questioning look and she gestured to Barry and Iris. Ronnie nodded as understanding dawned.

\* \* \*

><p><em> Diggle lashed out at Oliver's head, but he easily dodged the blow. 'Anchor the rear hand, Diggle,' Oliver advised. 'Come on.'  
<em>

\_'OK,' Diggle replied. They circled briefly before beginning again. A few seconds later Oliver landed a solid blow on Diggle's jaw.

—

\_'Uhh!' Diggle groaned, touching his jaw gingerly. \_

\_'Variable acceleration,' Matthew called out as Oliver circled Diggle. 'Most fighters work at the same pace. You switch it up, you throw your opponent off his game.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Impressive," Nyssa said, arching an eyebrow at Matthew. "I assume Yao Fei taught you that?"<p>

"He did," Oliver replied.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'That was nice,' Diggle admitted. 'Where'd you learn that?'<em>

\_'His name's Yao Fei,' Oliver replied.\_

\_'He give you those scars?' Diggle prodded, gesturing at Oliver's chest with a stick.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Talía eyed the bodyguard. "A lesson, Mr. Diggle: do not try to fish information about Lian Yu by asking them directly. There's still things they haven't shared with me or Dusan either, but we will not pressure them. You should do the same." Diggle grimaced as he realized that his self in the recordings was ignoring the advice he had given to Thea earlier. Moira, Thea, Quentin, and Laurel had the feeling that Talía's words, though directed at Diggle, were meant for them as well.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'One of them,' Matthew said coolly.<em>

\_'Any others?' When neither brother replied, he said, 'You know, one day you're gonna be straight with me about what really happened on that island.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't count on it," Oliver said quietly. That prompted winces from everyone except Ra's, Nyssa, and Malcolm.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Absolutely,' Oliver deadpanned as he and Diggle started once more. This time the bodyguard held his own for several seconds before Oliver spun away and landed a blow on the back of Diggle's knee, sending him to the floor.<em>

\_'Uhh!'\_

\_'But not today,' Oliver said lightly as he tossed his sticks aside and went to the computer. Matthew snickered, both at his brother's brazen glee and Diggle's discomfort.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The bodyguard shook his head and grumbled, "Hush, you," though without any real bite, as Thea began to laugh.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Still some pretty sweet moves,' Diggle said as he stood.<em>

\_'Yep. Tonight we're gonna use them on him,' Matthew replied as he pulled up a news article. 'Scott Morgan runs water and power in the Glades,' he continued as Oliver pulled his shirt on. 'Jacks up the prices when people can't pay, shuts them down even in the dead of



winter.'\_

\_Diggle gave a slight nod. 'Which is at least a month away.' He strode to the computer and pulled up another news article. 'Look at this. These guys started at Keystone three years ago, then began moving west, hitting banks along the way. This morning they hit Starling City Trust.' He turned to the brothers, who were listening with arms folded across their chests. 'Shot an off duty cop. He's in a coma and the doctors are saying it's a coin toss whether he'll make it.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Damn," Quentin snarled. "I knew his condition would be serious, but a coma?"<p>

Caitlin shook her head. "Ace either was a lousy shot, or else knew right where to hit him." She looked at Quentin. "If Officer Washington dies, you need to do your best to bring them in."

"That's if I don't get to him first," Oliver snarled.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'If he's a cop, SCPD will be all over it,' Matthew interjected.<em>

\_Diggle scoffed. 'Overwhelmed? Underfunded? Listen, these guys don't hit one time. They hit two or three banks per city, which means right now they're planning their next job.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Normally I would take issue with a comment like that, Mr. Diggle," Lance said reluctantly, "but you're right that SCPD is underfunded." He looked at Joe and Eddie. "Are Central and Keystone the same?" Both shook their heads.<p>

"It's not just that, though," Dusan put in. "SCPD would function a lot better if half the cops were fired."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I think you have the wrong impression about what it is we do,' Oliver replied coolly.<em>

\_ 'You take out bad guys with a bow and arrow.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin shook his head. If Queen and his brother would only stop dropping bodies, he would be more willing to look past the illegal vigilante activity. Now he was curious - as far as he could tell the Royal Flush Gang weren't on the List; they had no connection to it. To become something more than murderers, Quentin needed to see that the brothers cared about the city as a whole and not just as part of their 'crusade.'<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver shook his head in frustration. 'We don't fight street crime. That's a symptom of what's wrong with this city.' He picked up the List. 'We're trying to cure the disease.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm was torn on whether to agree or not. He had tried himself to clean up the city with no results, and that had been with him focusing more on the street crime. However, he knew from experience that would always exist; this Watchtower and the Justice League was proof of that. He wondered how the brothers would respond to the suggestion to see beyond the List.<p>

Ra's studied the screen thoughtfully. The brothers' dedication to crossing off the names on Robert Queen's List was commendable, but also shortsighted. They were failing to realize there was a much larger game going on here, if Al-Sa-Her and Mrs. Queen's actions in the previous recordings were any indication. He knew, of course, that the Oliver and Matthew Queen in the room with them had already realized that, but he wondered how long it would take for their onscreen selves to do so.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'CEOs and crooked entrepreneurs,' Diggle cut in. 'I get it. Listen, Oliver, I'm just saying, maybe you both can make a difference if you think beyond the scope of those pages. I'm sure your father wouldn't mind.'<em>

\_'No, you don't get it,' Matthew snapped. 'Our father died so that we could live. Live and make a difference by fixing the city that he and the people in this book ruined,' he emphasized, taking the notebook from Oliver. 'Every name that we cross off this list honors that sacrifice.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>It struck Moira how Oliver and Matthew had taken what Robert had done. A small part of her wished that Robert had died on the <strong>Gambit<strong> and not left Oliver and Matthew with this mission, but another part of her was proud of her sons' conviction.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There's more than one way to save this city,' Diggle pressed.<em>

\_'Not for us,' Oliver shot back. 'Crime happens in this city every day. What do you want us to do, stop all of it?'\_

\_Diggle sighed in exasperation. 'It sounds like you have a narrow definition of being a hero.' He brushed past them and left.\_

\_'We're not heroes,' Oliver said quietly, though Diggle was already gone.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you for trying, Mr. Diggle," Moira said quietly. He nodded

in acknowledgement.<p>

Laurel and Tommy both frowned at Oliver's statement, though for different reasons. Neither of them had realized that the brothers didn't see themselves that way. As the Hoods, they already made a difference in the city, but for Oliver to say they didn't see themselves as heroes - it was a statement as to how different they truly were. Tommy was somewhat glad that the brothers didn't see themselves as heroes, because heroes didn't drop bodies. Laurel, however, saw the law as broken in the Glades, and while she wouldn't call them heroes, she could see they were well on their way.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea<strong>\_

\_In the cave, the brothers slept fitfully. Oliver raised his head and looked at the dying fire. He tore a page out of the notebook, crumpling it up and tossing it into the flames.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm's eyes narrowed and a self satisfied smile curled his lips. So they didn't have a <em>complete<em> copy of the List, after all.

Dr. Stein interjected, "You didn't know about the List then, or you wouldn't have torn pages out, am I right?" Matthew nodded sharply.

"Correct, Dr. Stein."

\* \* \*

><p><em>A hand came down on his shoulder. He looked up - and backed away, scrambling to his feet in shock and disbelief. 'Dad?' he rasped. Robert Queen stared back at his elder son.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Thea's face lit up for a second, then she sagged in her chair as she remembered that her father was dead. Walter put his arm around her.<p>

Oliver turned and glared at Hal Jordan, but the man met his stare coolly. "We're not going to apologize, Oliver. Whether you like it or not, moments like this are important for the others to see." Oliver's glare hardened and his lips tightened, but he said nothing as he turned back to the front.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_At CNRI, Laurel seethed, 'Please tell me that this is a nightmare and I'm about to wake up,' as she pulled a file out of a cabinet drawer and slammed it shut. 'How can Staggs Industries pull out completely? They're our largest donor.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, no," Laurel muttered. She felt tears welling up but did her best to hold them back. "If Stagg pulls out, CNRI will be forced to close in weeks."<p>

"I'm sorry, Laurel," her father said. "You, Joanna, and the others have done good work at CNRI. If even they can't keep the doors open, you still helped a lot of people in Starling and I'm proud of you." He squeezed her shoulder lightly and gave her a reassuring smile. "Don't forget that."

"Thank you, Dad," she said, leaning her head against his shoulder.

"I'm proud of you too, sis," Sara added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Joanna was no happier than Laurel. 'It's like they say - 'it's the economy, stupid',' she said as they headed back to their desks.<em>

\_'No, it's the stupid economy,' Laurel muttered, and sighed. 'OK, without Stagg, how long can CNRI keep the doors open?'

\_'It depends,' Joanna replied. 'What time you got?'

\_'I have fiesta time,' Tommy Merlyn interrupted, bringing their eyes to him. 'Or is it siesta time?' he added with a smile. 'Which one means a party and which one means a nap?'

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco's laughter died in his throat as Laurel, Sara, Quentin, Tommy, Malcolm, Thea, Oliver, and Matthew all glared at him. The young man ducked his head as his face flushed red.<p>

"Laurel, I'm sorry," Tommy said, nodding at the screen. "I was being a jerk right there."

She shook her head. "It's not your fault, Tommy. You couldn't have known what was happening."

"Still doesn't excuse my behavior," he replied seriously.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Joanna quickly made herself scarce. Laurel glanced briefly at Tommy before returning her attention to the file she held. 'Tommy, as much as I would love to relive 'Intro to Spanish' with you, today is not a good day.'<em>

\_'Of course not,' Tommy agreed, misunderstanding Laurel's words. 'Working in this tiny brick office is intolerable. Now, you know where is a spectacular place to spend the day?' he continued as he followed her across the room. 'Coast City. Here's what I am thinking. Sunset flight on my private plane, dinner at Broome's, I'll have you home by midnight. Or maybe in the morning.'

\_Laurel looked at him in disbelief as she replaced the file in a drawer. 'What is this?'\_

\_'This is what we talked about. This is you getting to know the real me,' Tommy clarified, wondering why Laurel didn't seem enthused.\_

\_'Tommy, so you don't misunderstand, CNRI just lost its largest single donor,' Laurel told him, almost in tears. 'Which means all of the hard work and sacrifices that I have made to help this legal clinic survive, it may have been for nothing.' With a frustrated sigh, she sat at her desk and began to work. \_

\_Realizing that his offer had been ill timed, Tommy said quietly, 'Maybe another time. Yeah?' He left as Laurel looked after him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sara laid a hand on Laurel's arm. "It'll be all right," she said quietly. Laurel smiled faintly and clasped Sara's hand.<p>

"CNRI won't lose its funding in any case," Walter told the lawyer. "Queen Consolidated will make a sizeable donation to allow CNRI to keep the doors open."

"So will Merlyn Global," Malcolm added. That prompted skeptical stares from all the younger adults, but Malcolm only arched an eyebrow before turning his attention back to the recording.

Ra's narrowed his eyes. \_Theatricality and deception, indeed. \_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the Queen mansion the four siblings were on their way downstairs, Robbie running ahead of Oliver and the twins. 'I mean, haven't you noticed she's been acting a little down lately?' Thea was saying, then she scoffed. 'What am I saying? Of course you haven't.'<em>

\_'Well, who are you to judge? Since when do you pay attention to how Mom's feeling?' Oliver retorted.\_

\_'Since our stepfather suddenly decided to take a business trip halfway across the world.'\_

\_'I think when someone at Walter's pay grade takes a business trip, it's always sudden, Thea,' Oliver replied. 'I wouldn't worry.'\_

\_Their mother entered the foyer just then with a vase of flowers. Robbie gave her a quick hug before dashing into the sitting room. 'Ah, guess who I just hung up with,' Moira said as she looked up at her three older children. Oliver and Matthew spread their hands in confusion. 'Janice Bowen, Carter's mother,' she told them.\_

\* \* \*

><p>That brought groans of disgust from Tommy, Laurel, and Thea. Oliver muttered something under his breath that his brother and Sara both heard; the latter two had to suppress the impulse to

snicker.<p>

"I take it none of you care for this Carter Bowen?" Dr. Stein said dryly.

"No," Tommy said sharply. "He's an ass."

"Thomas," Moira admonished lightly.

"Well, he is," Tommy said unrepentantly. "I know you and Mrs. Bowen are friends, Mrs. Queen, but Carter has always been so full of himself."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oh,' was all Thea said. <em>

\_'Carter Bowen. The perfect son,' Oliver said lightly as the three descended the final steps. Moira looked at him in amusement. \_

\_'Is he perfect?' she asked archly.\_

\_'According to you.' Oliver recited, 'Carter Bowen just won the national chess championship. Carter Bowen is anchoring the debate team.'\_

\_'I'm sure I didn't make that big of a fuss,' Moira said defensively.\_

\_'Oliver, Carter just got accepted into Harvard and Princeton,' Thea continued.\_

\_'Well, that's because Carter got a perfect score on his SATs,' Oliver replied.\_

\_'Now, how did he manage to study and cure cancer?' Thea wondered. By this point Matthew was trying - and failing - not to laugh at the look on their mother's face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>All the younger adults were howling with laughter as Moira shook her head in resignation. Dr. Stein's lips twitched in amusement. Talia, Dusan, and Nyssa observed the reactions with interest, wondering just why this Carter Bowen was so disliked.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'All right, all right, all right. I get it, I get it,' Moira said, looking from one to the other of her children. 'Well, they're coming for brunch and I expect you to be there.'<em>

\_'I have plans,' Oliver replied immediately.\_

\_'That's fine. Brunch is tomorrow,' Moira replied, deflating him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>The twins both snickered and Oliver shot them a sour look. "Thought you could get out of it, eh?" Thea needled her older

brother.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea snickered. 'Hmm. Inches from a clean getaway,' she mocked lightly.<em>

\_'Well, you and Matt too, Thea,' Moira added. The satisfied smile disappeared from Thea's face. \_

\_'Oh, just perfect,' Matthew muttered. \_

\* \* \*

><p>It was Oliver's turn to laugh as the twins glowered at their mother, who looked back at them calmly, though a hint of a smile was visible on her lips.<p>

Malcolm chuckled and said, "You certainly didn't let any of them off the hook, Moira."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver snapped his fingers at his sister.  
'Snap.'<em>

\_'Nobody says that anymore,' she shot back. \_

\_'Moira started to leave but stopped as Oliver said, 'Mom.' \_

\_'Hmm?' she said, turning back to them. \_

\_'I can't actually go.' \_

\_'Moira was having none of it. 'I haven't seen the Bowens in years. So whatever it is that you have planned, I'm sure the three of you can make the sacrifice just this once.' \_

\_'Oliver sighed in resignation. 'We'll be there.' Matthew nodded in affirmation, as did Thea, though more grudgingly. \_

\_'When she was gone, Oliver turned to the twins. 'I hate you,' Thea muttered before stalking off. Matthew glared at him, but before the teen could say anything Oliver's cell rang. He fished it out and answered. \_

\_'Yeah?' \_

\_'Outside the hospital, Diggle said, 'You know your friend Scott Morgan from your father's list? He tried to kill himself. Maybe he was afraid of getting a visit from you. How fast can you and Matthew make it to Starling General?' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Now wait just a minute," Oliver muttered. Clark Kent signaled for the recording to pause. Oliver furrowed his brow in concentration for a minute before turning to Diggle. "Even if Scott Morgan had been worried about a visit from the Hoods, I very much doubt he would have tried to kill himself. If he had, why would you have bothered asking

me to come to the hospital to see him?"<p>

"Of course," Barry said in realization.

"What?" Cisco asked, confused.

"Diggle isn't asking them to come to the hospital because of Scott Morgan, Mr. Ramon," Dusan said - like Oliver he had quickly made the connection. "Though they don't know it yet, he's called them because of Officer Stan Washington."

"You're to be commended, Mr. Diggle," Ra's said as he looked at the bodyguard. Diggle shook his head in mingled surprise and amusement as the recording resumed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'On our way,' Oliver replied. He ended the call and jerked his head toward the door. At that moment Tommy walked in.<em>

\_'Hey, just the man I wanted to see,' his friend said. 'I just picked up a new sports car, and I'm thinking we can open her up, pick up a few speeding tickets -'\_'

\* \* \*

><p>With a groan, Laurel turned to Tommy. "How do you even have your license anymore?" she asked in exasperation.<p>

He shrugged in reply, though the smile stayed on his lips. If only speeding tickets applied to the car and not his license; thus far he had managed to avoid having it suspended. His premium, on the other hand, kept going through the roof.

Malcolm scowled at yet another reminder of his son's escapades. Tommy's car insurance had long been a sticking point with the elder Merlyn.

Quentin made a mental note to have Tommy's car, or any future cars for that matter, impounded, especially if the young man continued to pursue his daughter. The cop did not want Laurel in any car with Merlyn.

Joe was thinking similar thoughts to Quentin. He had more or less done the same thing with several of Iris' previous boyfriends. \_Speed demons, the lot of them, \_he thought.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oliver cut him off. 'That sounds great, but something's come up. I gotta jet.' He brushed past Tommy with Matthew close behind.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Ronnie winched. "Ouch, Oliver. Brushing off your friend like that?"<p>

Oliver shook his head. "I didn't have time to waste, Mr. Raymond."



"If I were to chose between my friend and going to the hospital to see a guy I was going after, who attempted to off himself, I would chose the latter. I wouldn't want to get in trouble given how I just got off from being charged as a vigilante," Matthew deadpanned.

"See? Matt agrees with me," Oliver pointed out.

Tommy winced, while Ronnie nodded sagely.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oh. Uh, OK. Nice talk. Thanks.' Tommy shook his head, looking after the brothers with a puzzled frown.<em>

\_'He moves fast, doesn't he?' Thea said as she entered the foyer.\_

\_'It's ironic, really, since you're the one we call Speedy,' Tommy pointed out as he turned to her.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea growled as Tommy and Oliver tried to hold back their laughter. Clark Kent looked at Barry, then back at Arthur Curry, Hal Jordan, and Bruce Wayne with a raised eyebrow and a knowing smile on his lips. The other Founders chuckled quietly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thea rolled her eyes. 'Ah, "called." Oh, please. For the love of God.' She laughed lightly. 'But if you need somebody to talk to, I'm here.'<em>

\_'You know, maybe you could help,' Tommy said slowly. 'There's this girl that I'm interested in. And I am really not sure how to pursue it.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin snorted and Laurel shifted in her chair; they both knew Tommy was talking about her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Have you tried using your usual lines?' Thea asked. ' "Hi, my name is Tommy Merlyn and I'm a billionaire, but I don't look like Warren Buffet." '<em>

\_'Yeah, she is aware of that, and she doesn't care. You know, money really isn't a big deal to her.'\_

\_'Why don't you just tell her how you feel?'\_

\_'Well, I've - I've known her for a long time, and I'm not sure the direct approach is really the right way to go,' he admitted.\_

\_'Maybe you just have to figure out what's a big deal to her and make

it a big deal to you,' Thea advised.\_

\_Tommy smiled. 'Thea, you are amazing. Love you.' He kissed her on the cheek and left, leaving her standing there with a wistful smile on her face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira groaned and Malcolm shot his son a hard glare. Both siblings, acutely aware of their parents' disapproval, flushed a dark red.<p>

"Seriously, Mrs. Queen," Tommy muttered, "couldn't you have told Thea we're related any sooner?"

"What?" Cisco cried, gaping at Tommy. Barry, Iris, Eddie, Caitlin, and Ronnie were just as startled to hear that. Dr. Stein arched an eyebrow as Joe and Henry leaned back in their chairs with thoughtful looks. William stared in disbelief at Thea, then turned to look at Malcolm.

"I thought about it, but I wanted to keep her safe from your father," Moira said in reply to Tommy's question.

Malcolm looked affronted. "I would never hurt my daughter or my son, Moira."

\* \* \*

><p><em>The brothers rode their motorcycles down to Starling General Hospital. Diggle was waiting near the emergency entrance, close to an ambulance that had just arrived. Quickly removing their helmets and unzipping their jackets, they hopped off the cycles and went to Diggle. 'You sure? Scott Morgan doesn't seem like the type who would try to kill himself,' Matthew said.<em>

\_ 'True, but it's the best lie I could come up with on short notice,' Diggle replied in a deadpan tone as the paramedics opened the ambulance doors and lowered the stretcher. Oliver stiffened and Matthew hissed in anger as they saw the man on the stretcher was the comatose Stan Washington. Oliver glared at the bodyguard, but before he could speak, a woman who had been watching Washington's transfer approached the trio and shook Diggle's hand.\_

\_ 'Mr. Diggle, I can't thank you enough for arranging to move my husband from County Ward to Starling General. Now I know he's getting the best care available,' she said tearfully.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"You have my thanks as well, Mr. Diggle," Quentin said, turning to look at the bodyguard. "Stan Washington is a good man and a great cop." Diggle nodded.<p>

"Like you said yesterday - all officers have to stick together."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You really should be thanking this man, Oliver Queen. He's paying the bill.' Oliver looked at her with a reassuring smile,

holding his anger in check. 'Jana's husband Stan is a police officer, who happened to have been making a deposit at Starling Trust Bank.'

\_'The bank that was robbed,' Matthew said. He turned to her. 'I was so sorry to hear about your husband,' he said gently. 'Is he gonna be OK? '\_

\_'The doctors say the next twenty-four hours are crucial,' Mrs. Washington said. She drew a shaky breath. 'He should have just kept his head down, you know? '\_

\_'I've known a few police officers in my day. Always willing to help others even if that means putting themselves at risk,' Diggle said gently. She nodded before looking at the brothers.\_

\_'Thank you.' \_

\_'You're welcome,' Oliver replied. She managed to give them a smile before hurrying into the hospital after her husband. \_

\_'When she was gone, Oliver whirled on Diggle. 'You lied to us,' he said angrily.\_

\_'You asked me to work with you, not for you,' Diggle replied calmly. 'And when you did, you said it was because you understand the kind of man I am. Well, I'm the kind of man who doesn't walk away when there's a chance to make a difference. And neither does Stan Washington.' They brushed past Diggle and went to their motorcycles. 'Oliver, I'm not finished talking. Where are you going? '\_

\_'To go make a difference,' Matthew called back as he kicked his motorcycle into life. 'Let's catch some bank robbers.' Diggle smiled as they roared off.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Brazen, Mr. Diggle, but effective," Ra's said calmly.<p>

Uncertain how to respond to such a comment from a clearly dangerous man, Diggle settled for giving Ra's a nod.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the factory, the trio pulled up the security feeds from the bank robbery, analyzing the footage for clues to the robbers' identities.<em>

\_'See that guy right there?' Diggle said, pointing to the man in the Ace mask. 'He's got a temper.' \_

\_'And he shot Officer Washington,' Matthew noted.\_

\_'That's right.' \_

\_'Oliver zoomed in on Ace's raised right hand. 'College ring.' \_

\_'Or high school, more likely,' Diggle mused.\_

\_'That ring will get us an ID,' Matthew remarked.\_\_

\_Diggle zoomed in on the ring. 'Yeah, but even with photo enhancement, you're gonna have a problem getting a clear shot of that ring.'\_

\_'No, but it left an impression the police would have photographed. It'll be in evidence lockup,' Oliver replied.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Joe snorted sourly. "I know where this is going," he said, eyeing Oliver steadily.<p>

The younger man shrugged and replied, "Detective West, if police evidence would help us identify the robbers, I'd be a fool to pass the opportunity up. Besides, I wouldn't physically be removing evidence from the PD, just copying it for my own use."

Barry shook his head. He wasn't sure how he felt about this - on one hand he knew the brothers were right to follow whatever evidence they could, but on the other hand, sneaking into a PD was risky.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Please tell me you're not going where I think you're going,' Diggle muttered as the two grabbed their jackets.<em>

\_'Diggle, why do you even ask?' Oliver shot back.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Cisco laughed. "He has you there," he said to Diggle. The bodyguard only shook his head.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later that night the vigilantes entered the police station through an unlocked window. Warily they crept forward, senses on alert. Somewhere in the building a phone rang. Then they heard voices; it was Hilton and another officer. Quickly they jumped to the ceiling, bracing themselves against the rafters as the two walked by below. Hilton's voice carried clearly to their ears. 'Are you kidding me? I don't want to hear this. Don't tell me about red tape. One of our own's been shot. Tell them to find themselves a pair of scissors.'<em>

\* \* \*

><p>All three cops grimaced, as did Barry. "The joys of government bureaucracy," Eddie said darkly.<p>

"He sounds frustrated," Nyssa observed, referring to Hilton.

"He has every right to be," Quentin snapped.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Once the officers were gone the brothers jumped down and made their way into the main room just as another cop walked out without

seeing them. Matthew paced warily, keeping watch as Oliver sat at a computer and quickly hacked into the evidence files, saving the file he needed to a flash drive. Once finished, he pocketed the drive and the two left as silently as they had entered.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Laurel and Sara both laughed at the sour look on their father's face. Thea and William gave him smug grins. Even Malcolm was amused by Quentin's ire.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The following morning Laurel entered CNRI - and was stunned to see Tommy sitting by Joanna's desk.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"You don't give up, do you?" Cisco muttered, eyeing Tommy with a faint look of disgust. Tommy glowered at him.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'So, where are you gonna take me today? Monte Carlo?' she snarked, not at all happy by his presence there.<em>

\_Tommy chuckled. 'Actually, I was just telling Jo here that the Merlyn Global Group is looking to expand it's local philanthropy, and I thought that we could start by sponsoring a benefit for CNRI.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"See? I'm not that bad," Tommy said as he turned to Laurel. Sara snorted in amusement.<p>

"No, you are," Laurel retorted. "But thank you," she added quickly. She was worried about CNRI, but this was a reminder that she had friends that would help her and her job if necessary.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Thank you, Tommy, but I think we can manage without your family's finances,' she replied immediately. Tommy's smile fell, and Joanna looked between the two.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Thea and Iris both winced. "Ouch," the younger of the two muttered.<p>

"Really?" Caitlin gave Laurel a hard stare. Laurel grimaced and turned to Tommy, who had a hurt expression on his face.

"I didn't mean that," she told him. She couldn't believe how much of an idiot her onscreen self was being. Her workplace was going to close for good and her stupid pride was getting in the way of his offer. "I didn't mean that," she repeated. "Thank you." She knew that while Tommy might be doing the benefit mostly because of his attraction to Laurel, he was also doing it because he cared about her. Her work meant a lot to her, and so meant it meant a lot to him

too.

He gave her a smile, telling her it was forgiven. After all, the people in these recordings weren't them, and he had to remind himself of that.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Laurel, a word?' Joanna steered her to a quiet corner of the room. 'Come on. What are you doing?'<em>

\_ 'He's not interested in throwing us a fundraiser. What he wants to have is the first annual attempt to get back into my pants gala,' Laurel hissed in exasperation.\_

\* \* \*

><p>That prompted uproarious laughter from Matthew, Thea, William, Barry, and Iris. Sara shook her head and looked away to hide her smile as her older sister glared at the offenders.<p>

"That's not true," Tommy said, faking offense. When he received several dangerous glares, particularly from Laurel and Caitlin, he added nervously, "Not completely." Malcolm shook his head and vowed again that he would cut Tommy off when they returned.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Who cares why he's doing it? We need the money.' They both looked at Tommy, but he looked away. <em>

\_ 'Not like that we don't,' Laurel muttered.\_

\_ 'We really do.' Joanna gave her a wicked smile. 'So you're gonna listen to your best friend's advice. You are gonna go over there and say, 'Thank you, Tommy. We'd be honored if you'd throw us a fundraiser.' Hmm?' She raised her eyebrows.\_

\_Laurel rolled her eyes, but plastered a smile on her face as they returned to Tommy. 'Thank you, Tommy. We would be honored for you to throw us a fundraiser,' she deadpanned. He gave her a genuine smile.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea, William, Barry, Cisco, Ronnie, and Felicity all snickered at Laurel's insincerity.<p>

"You're welcome," Tommy said cheerfully. Laurel swatted him gently on the arm, rolling her eyes as Tommy rubbed it in mock hurt before returning her attention to the recording.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the Lair, the brothers were reviewing the evidence they had netted at the PD. 'The bank manager Ace punched, his ring left a mark,' Oliver said. He zoomed in on the photo and ran a cross check. 'Larchmont High,' he said as a match flashed on the screen. 'High school. I cross-referenced his height and relative age with a list of students and alumni.'<em>

\_ 'Still, that's a pretty long list,' Diggle replied.\_

\_ 'It was. I dug a little deeper and found Kyle Reston.' Reston's photo popped up. 'Right before Kyle's senior year, not only did he drop out, he dropped off the grid. Along with his family - father, mother, younger brother.' Diggle leaned over the brothers' shoulders as a photo of the Reston family came up.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait," Walter interjected, leaning forward to stare intently at the photo. Bruce immediately signaled for the playback to pause.<p>

"What is it, Walter?" Thea asked. Everyone else turned to the man in curiosity.

"I thought the name Reston sounded familiar, but it wasn't until I saw the picture that I knew for certain." He nodded at the screen before turning to his stepchildren with a grim expression. "Derek Reston was the foreman for the steel factory in the Glades." Matthew cursed softly and Oliver growled under his breath. "Shortly before your father closed the factory, he met with the workers and assured them that the rumors of production being outsourced to China were untrue." The Brit shook his head. "Two weeks later the doors closed."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'There are two other guys involved in this robbery,' Diggle mused.<em>

\_ Matthew nodded. 'And a woman.' He leaned forward and pulled up several feeds. 'Aside from Stan Washington, there were twenty-two customers and employees that came out of the bank. Nine men, thirteen women. Inside the bank - nine men, fourteen women.'\_

\_ Diggle instantly made the connection. 'They put a ringer in.'\_

\_ Oliver nodded. 'The mom. The police are looking for a crew, we're gonna look for a family. Speaking of which, I'm incredibly late for mine.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew groaned in disgust and muttered something under his breath; Talia, Dusan, and Oliver barely managed to restrain their laughter when they heard him.<p>

"What did you say, Matthew?" Moira asked, turning to him with narrowed eyes. He shrugged and gave her an impish grin before settling back in his seat.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the mansion Moira and Thea welcomed Carter and his mother. 'Well, I'm sorry Walter couldn't join us,' Janice Bowen told Moira.<em>

\_She shrugged. 'Oh, yes, well, the Australian trip came up suddenly. He sends his apologies.'\_

\_ 'W\_\_here are Oliver and Matthew?' Carter asked. 'They're not out of town too, are they? '\_

\* \* \*

><p>"No, but I'm sure they wish they were back on the island," Thea muttered. "I know I'd rather be there." Moira frowned on hearing her daughter's words<p>

"No, you don't, Speedy," Matthew retorted, barely suppressing a shudder as he thought back to Lian Yu. At his twin's confused look, he clarified, "Land mines." Thea's eyes widened in dismay. The others, too, were just as startled to hear this, but held their questions.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Oh, I'm sure they're just -'<em>

\_ 'Stuck in traffic,' Matthew interrupted as they strode into the room. He went to Moira and hugged her.\_

\_ 'One of the things we didn't miss on the island? Sunday drivers,' Oliver said. He kissed his mother on the cheek as Matthew hugged Thea. 'Sorry we're late.'\_

\_He had to stifle the urge to snort when he heard Thea whisper into Matthew's ear, 'Thank God you're here.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Can we just skip this part of the memory?" Thea grouched. He brothers, Tommy, and Laurel nodded in agreement. None of them wanted to hear Carter drone on about the greatness of his life that was sure to come in a few moments.<p>

"No," Arthur Curry said quietly, hiding his amusement at the groans that erupted from the four.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'It is so good to see you,' Janice told Oliver, giving him a kiss on the cheek. 'We all thought you were -'<em>

\_ 'Well, we are just happy they're home,' Moira interrupted, rubbing her younger son's back.\_

\_ 'And returning a celebrity, too,' Carter offered as he shook hands with the brothers.\_

\_ 'How do you mean?' Oliver asked as the six of them sat down at the dining room table.\_

\_ 'Billionaire scions, castaways for five years. You know, there is a bidding war for the rights to your life story. At least that's what my agent says.'\_



\* \* \*

><p>"I'm sure he's trying to figure out a way to be a castaway himself and write a book while curing every major disease," Thea deadpanned. Moira finally hushed her.<p>

"Not exactly a lie, Mrs. Queen." Tommy added.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Agent?' Oliver queried in disbelief. 'I thought you were a neurosurgeon, Carter.'<em>

\_'I know. It's crazy, right?' Carter continued. 'One minute I'm publishing this book on how long term potentiation initiates the creation of a slow-moving protein synthesis, and the next, there's an agent trying to make me the next Dr. Oz.' Thea subtly rolled her eyes at her twin as Carter finished; Matthew had to bite his lip to keep from laughing.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Several people covered up their laughs.<p>

"If you decide to invite Carter, make sure to gag him," Thea said innocently to her mother, prompting a snicker from Matthew.

"What a bore," Barry muttered.

Iris leaned close to him and whispered teasingly, "Good thing you're not like that." She kissed him on the cheek, leaving him gulping in surprise and her father and Henry gave her disbelieving looks.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Why would he want you to be a wizard?' Oliver asked in confusion.<em>

\_'The others, except Matthew, laughed. 'Oh, Oliver,' Moira chastised lightly.\_\_

\_'For all our sakes, start reading US Weekly,' Thea advised. Oliver stared at her in irritation.\_\_

\_'Well, the truth is, I just feel it's our duty as Starling City's more fortunate to help those most in need,' Carter said.\_\_

\_'Oh, of course,' Moira replied.\_\_

\_'Wouldn't you agree, Oliver?' Carter asked, turning to him.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Ass," Thea growled.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You're the hero, Carter,' Oliver replied with a false smile.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Not my idea of a good time," Matthew said, shooting Moira a dark look. She only sighed, aware now of how much effort it had taken her children to put up with Carter's boorishness.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The thieves' van pulled up near the First Bank of Starling. Inside, Reston gave final orders to his sons. 'Quick and clean, and try not to shoot anybody,' he added, glaring at Kyle. They pulled their masks down and leaped from the van, using the jackhammer to break the lock on the door.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"So it begins," Ronnie muttered.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'So now that you're back, what are your plans?' Janice asked the brothers. 'Will you be taking a job with Queen Consolidated?'<em>

\_'Eventually,' Matthew replied. 'I have several years of missed school to catch up on first.'\_

\_'Will you be attending classes with Thea?' Carter asked.\_

\_'The boy shook his head. 'Mom has arranged to have me tutored here at home, starting after Christmas. To be honest, I'm not comfortable returning to a busy classroom after five years in isolation.' He winced and looked away. Thea reached over and laid her hand on top of his, their fingers lacing together. He gave her a small smile.\_

\_'Wishing to spare Matthew's feelings, Janice turned to Oliver. 'I'm opening a nightclub,' he told her.\_

\_'Thea snorted with laughter and their mother looked surprised, but before anyone could speak Diggle came in with Oliver's cell phone. 'Sir, your liquor distributor's on the line.' With his back to the others, he whispered low enough that only Oliver could hear, 'First Bank of Starling was hit two minutes ago.'\_

\_'Oliver laid his napkin down and stood. 'Sorry. Business,' he said apologetically. Matthew started to rise, but Oliver gave an infinitesimal shake of his head. Moira stared after her elder son as he left the room.\_

\_'Once they were out of earshot, Diggle told him, 'If the Restons' MO holds, they'll make their escape underground. First Bank of Starling is located right above the water treatment tunnels. The entrance is located here.' He handed the phone to Oliver just as Moira entered the foyer.\_

\_'Oliver. Where are you going?' she asked in frustration.\_

\_ 'Something's come up. I 'm really sorry,' he told her, and left.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moirra sighed and Oliver had the grace to look mildly  
ashamed.<p>

"Thanks a lot for leaving me to put up with Carter Bowen, by the way," Matthew grumbled, shooting Oliver a look. "I would much rather have gone with you."

\* \* \*

><p><em>With sirens wailing, several police cars skidded to a stop outside First Bank of Starling. Officers and SWAT men leaped out. Inside, the robbers were hurriedly stuffing the cash into bags.  
<em>

\_As the three men made their way to the tunnel exit with their loot, they were stopped short by the appearance of Hilton and his men, who had gone through the tunnel instead of entering the bank directly. 'SCPD! Don't move!' Hilton shouted.\_

\_Ace raised his gun and fired several times, prompting return fire from the officers. King pushed his sons behind cover. 'Enough! What are you doing?!' he roared at Ace.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Can you say trigger happy?!" Iris muttered.<p>

William winced. "Yeah. Derek Reston seems to be a reasonable man, but Kyle is too hot headed. He's bound to get himself killed - and I won't shed any tears over it."

\* \* \*

><p><em>The robbers and police continued to exchange fire. At that moment, the Emerald Archer appeared in the shadows. Drawing his bow, he sent an arrow flying directly into a bag of cash that Ace held. The bag flew out of his grip and landed on the floor, immobilized by thin, but strong, wires. On seeing the vigilante, the robbers began firing at him, but Oliver loosed another arrow to send Ace's gun spinning away. Then he fired a third arrow into a second bag of cash, securing it just as he had done the first.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"How'd you come up with those arrows?" Cisco asked in amazement.<p>

Oliver turned to him and replied, "Who says I've come up with those arrows already?"

Cisco looked disconcerted. "I ... I thought ..."

"That I'd been using trick arrows for a while?" Oliver finished. "At this point -" he nodded at the screen " - I probably have. But right now, the right now being April 2012 for me, I don't use arrows like that because I don't have the equipment." He smiled and patted the

crestfallen young man's shoulder. "It was a good guess, Cisco."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Let's get out of here!' King shouted.<em>

\_'The cash!' Jack wailed.\_

\_'Forget it!' Ace tried to wrest the bag free, but King stopped him.  
'Go! '\_

\_'All right, let's move!' Hilton shouted as he saw the robbers retreat. Then he spotted Oliver. 'It's the vigilante! '\_

\_'Oliver spun and sent an arrow into the electrical box, plunging the tunnel into darkness. Hilton and the others moved forward cautiously as they continued to search for both the robbers and him.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Ollie," Tommy said, impressed. "You stopped them from getting away with the money that time." Oliver smiled.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>That night the Restons mused over their change in fortune.<em>

\_'Who the hell was that guy?' Ted Reston asked his parents.\_

\_'One of the local vigilantes. Usually goes after rich guys,' his father replied.\_

\_'Well, clearly he's branching out,' Kyle snarled.\_

\_'Things have gone sideways for us lately,' his mother said disgustedly. 'That hood guy showing up, Kyle shooting a cop.' She glared at her son.\_

\_'You were the one who warned me he was a cop,' Kyle snapped.\_

\_'So you would take his gun, not shoot him,' she retorted.\_

\_'Your mother is right,' Derek said placatingly. 'Maybe this is a sign we need to hang it up. Head for Mexico, retire.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>"Great idea," Quentin muttered. Ronnie, Caitlin, Cisco, Thea, Barry, Iris, and Tommy nodded in agreement.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'We don't have enough,' Ted growled. 'We've always said that we wouldn't quit until we had enough to set ourselves up.'<em>

\_'The kid's right,' Kyle added. 'We need to hit another.' \_

\_'We'll be OK. We can make do with what we've got,' their father replied.\_

\_ 'I didn't spend five years risking my life and my freedom to just be OK,' Kyle snapped, standing nose to nose with his father. 'No. Set for life. That was our deal.' \_

\_ Derek eyed his son before he said, 'OK. One more.' He leaned forward. 'And then we're out.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm shook his head. "Kyle is too far gone. He won't listen to reason."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Queen Consolidated the following day Oliver, Matthew, and Diggle were in Walter's office when Felicity Smoak entered.<em>

\_ 'Ah, Miss Smoak,' Matthew said as he extended his hand. 'My brother's told me so much about you. I'm Matthew Queen.' \_

\_ Felicity looked at him in surprise. 'I - I -' she stuttered. Matthew simply waited, though Felicity could see the faintly amused smile on his face. Finally she found her voice again.\_

\_ 'It's a pleasure to finally meet the other castaway,' she managed.\_

\_ 'Why are you so surprised to see me here?' he asked mildly.\_

\_ 'I never thought you were interested in the family business,' she replied. 'I - I mean - I've never see you around.' Oliver snickered.\_

\_ Matthew smiled. 'On the contrary, Miss Smoak, you will be seeing more of me in the future. My stepfather speaks very highly of you, and I know my brother and I can count on your discretion whenever we ask for your help.' \_

\_ 'Of course,' she managed.\_

\_ 'Let's get down to business, shall we?' Matthew gestured to Oliver to take the chair behind the desk while he and Diggle perched on the edges, all three facing Felicity.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Felicity ducked her head in embarrassment as Matthew gave her a knowing grin. Muffled snickers came from Cisco, Barry, Ronnie, and William.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I should add 'personal Internet researcher for Oliver and Matthew Queen' to my job title,' Felicity muttered as she opened her laptop. Oliver cleared his throat and she looked up. 'Happily, I mean,' she clarified with a smile, pushing her glasses back up her nose. Matthew smirked and Diggle grinned lightly.<em>

\_ 'His name is Derek Reston. We were close before I went away. And I want to get back in touch,' Oliver told her. Felicity nodded.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew groaned and looked at Oliver. "Another crappy excuse, Ollie? I could've come up with something better."<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'I guess you didn't have Facebook on that island.'<em>

\_ 'Nope,' Diggle deadpanned. 'Not even a Myspace account. It was a very dark time.'\_

\_Felicity started her search through the Reston records. 'Well, there's not much here that's recent. No credit activity. No utility bills.' Derek Reston's Queen Consolidated ID badge popped up on the screen, and she paused. 'Well, I guess you guys must have met at the factory,' she said as she looked up.\_

\_Oliver and Matthew traded confused looks. 'Wait. What - what factory?' Matthew asked, leaning forward.\_

\_ 'The Queen Steel Factory.' Matthew inhaled sharply. 'Derek Reston worked there for fifteen years until it shut down in '07.'\_

\_ 'Derek Reston worked for my father?' Matthew said, stunned.\_

\_Felicity eyed them. 'You weren't really close friends, huh? It looks like Derek was the factory foreman until your dad outsourced production to China. About fifteen hundred employees got laid off. Looks like the finance guys even found a loophole in the union contract, so they didn't have to pay severance packages and pensions to their employees. They all pretty much lost their homes. Including your friend,' she finished.\_

\_The brothers sat back, stunned by what they had heard.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Oliver sighed heavily. "What a mess," he said shortly, pinning his mother and Walter with a glare. "It's our family's fault this happened." After a moment Moira nodded soberly.<p>

"You're right, Oliver."

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea<em>\*\*

\_Oliver stared at his father. 'You died,' he gasped, disbelieving.\_

\_ 'I asked you, I begged you to survive,' Robert said disgustedly. 'But if you don't think you can -' he pulled the gun from his back pants pocket. 'There's still one bullet left.' He held the gun out to

his son. Oliver reached for it, but Robert tightened his grip on the barrel. 'But, Oliver, my death is made meaningless by yours. Besides, you have a duty to your brother. You cannot leave him alone here. He needs you.' Oliver turned to look at the sleeping Matthew, then back to his father. \_

\_Robert let go of the gun, sighing as Oliver palmed it. 'I'm starving. I'm gonna die anyway, and I just want it to be quick. I want it to be quick, like yours was,' Oliver replied. \_

\_'You can survive this,' Robert insisted.\_

\_'No, I can't. I'm not as strong as you think I am. And I'm sorry.' He raised the gun to his temple ...\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Wasn't my brightest moment," Oliver muttered, aware of the horrified looks he was receiving from most of the others, particularly Moira, Thea, and Walter.<p>

"Would you really have killed yourself?" Thea asked in dismay.

"Yes," he replied honestly. "I didn't want to live as if I was barely existing anymore."

His statement hit everyone else like a punch to the gut.

Moira was hard pressed to hold back tears. Had their encounter with Edward Fyers shaken Oliver so badly that he felt he had no reason to live?

Thea, too, was shaken by her brother's admission. What if he had gone through with it? She couldn't imagine it if Matthew had returned home but not Oliver.

Walter felt regret for his stepson and a little anger at Robert for having placed such a burden on his sons' shoulders.

Tommy was ashen faced at what he had seen. Even knowing Oliver hadn't gone through with it did not lessen the fear he had felt.

Malcolm was not too surprised by Oliver's reaction; he had guessed something like this would come, but was mildly surprised it hadn't happened sooner.

Quentin shook his head in resignation, guilt over his actions in the previous recording creeping into his mind. Seeing the torture Queen had undergone, now this ... he felt worse than ever about the way he had treated Oliver so far.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>2012<em>\*\*

\_'The Restons just got home after five years of being away,' Oliver said as the three of them left Walter's office.\_

\_'Those factory guys hung out at a bar after work,' Diggle replied as

he adjusted his jacket.\_\_

\_'I'm going down there,' Oliver announced. He punched the elevator button. 'Hopefully Derek Reston wants to take a stroll down memory lane.'\_\_

\_'And if by some miracle Reston's there?' Diggle probed.\_\_

\_'I'm gonna give him the chance to do the right thing.'\_\_

\_'Oliver, he already had his chance to do the right thing. It's called not being a criminal.'\_\_

\_'Oliver turned on him. 'This is happening because of my father. Because of my family,' he said in a pained voice.\_\_

\_'No. You're worried about the wrong thing. It's not your fault. The Restons aren't the victims,' Diggle pointed out.\_\_

\_'My family stole from this city,' Matthew retorted, breaking his silence. 'They hurt the people in it. And we are hell-bent on making that right.' The elevator door opened and the brothers went in. Oliver hit the button for the ground floor. 'For Derek Reston, that means giving him the chance to make it right,' the teen finished as the doors closed.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Malcolm shook his head in disgust. <em>Noble fools, <em>he thought.

\* \* \*

><p><em>At CNRI Tommy and Laurel were deep in planning for the benefit.<em>

\_'Hey, don't fade on me now,' Tommy prodded as Laurel yawned. 'We have about ten thousand more decisions to make. Now, cake - chocolate or mocha?'\_\_

\_'Mmm - carrot,' Laurel replied.\_\_

\_'Are you sure about that? Because Bugs Bunny hasn't RSVP'd yet.' She chuckled before looking straight at him.\_\_

\_'Tommy, why the full-court press? Asking me to Coast City, the fundraiser - why now?'\_\_

\_'He paused for several; seconds before leaning back in his chair and tapping his fingers on the table. 'You know, I was in a bar last week, and I was talking to this girl, and things were progressing, if you know what I mean.'\_\_

\_'No. You're too subtle,' she rejoined.\_\_

\_'Anyway, we finally go back to her place, and I realize all of a sudden - that I'd been there before. Been with her before. Two years ago. Just didn't remember. So I left.' He sighed and leaned forward. 'You know, I remember some of the mornings when you and I were together and I made you omelets.' They both smiled at that. 'And I'd



be in your kitchen and I would think to myself, this isn't just fun. This is more than fun. This is - this is different. I never felt that way with anybody else. And I miss it.' He stopped, looked away, then back to the papers before then. 'Not mocha. Carrot.'\_\_

\_\_'Carrot,' she agreed.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Quentin snorted, but was silenced by a sharp glare from Sara. "You know, you can be quite surprising sometimes," Laurel said softly. Tommy smiled.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At the bar, Derek Reston grinned as he flipped a card over. 'OK, fellas. Thanks for playing.' His buddies rose and left. As Derek gathered the cards, Oliver cleared his throat.<em>

\_\_'Mind if I sit in?' He sat down across from Reston without waiting for an invitation.\_\_

\_\_'Oliver Queen,' Derek replied coolly. 'The prodigal son returns. I didn't figure you for someone who would hang out in the Glades.'\_\_

\_\_'My father used to bring me here after we visited the factory,' Oliver said wistfully. 'There was a Pac-Man machine in the back. I had the high score for two months.'\_\_

\_\_'The last time I saw your dad,' Derek said icily, 'he was making a speech, telling my crew not to believe all the gossip, that there was no way Queen Consolidated was moving production to China. A week later, they closed the doors.' He leaned forward. 'I didn't even get the two weeks' vacation pay due to me.'\_\_

\_\_'My father made mistakes,' Oliver replied calmly. 'He hurt people. When people are hurt, people are in trouble, they tend to make the wrong choices.' Derek shifted in his seat and Oliver pinned him with a stare. 'Right, Derek? But those choices don't have to define you, they don't have to define who your family will be, because there's always one moment when you can turn it all around. If my father had another chance, I think he'd do things differently -' He shook his head. 'But time ran out for him.'\_\_

\_\_ 'How poetic,' Derek retorted, clearly unconvinced. 'That doesn't help me get my house back, now, does it?'\_\_

\_\_'No, it doesn't. No, all I can offer you is an apology and a job. Queen Consolidated has subsidiaries all over the country. I make one phone call, you start next week.' Derek leaned back in his chair. 'So what do you say?' Oliver prodded.\_\_

\_\_'How about I still have some pride left?' Derek spat. 'I don't need charity from the son of the man who screwed me over.'\_\_

\_\_'OK,' Oliver replied calmly. He fished a business card from his pocket and held it up. 'If you change your mind -' He stood and started to walk away, then paused. 'You and I have one thing in common. We're both dealing with the consequences of my father's

actions.' Derek looked up at him, then away. 'What he did then, that's on him. What we do now, that's on us.' He laid the card on the table before stealthily slipping a bug into Reston's jacket.\_

\_That night the brothers listened in on the Restons' conversation from the Lair.\_

\*\*\_'I've been thinking, baby, maybe you were right. Maybe it's time to hang it up, retire,' \_\*\*\_Derek said.\_

\*\*\_'But Kyle says we do one more or he'll go out on his own,'\_\*\*\_his wife replied.\_

\*\*\_'Well, if that's what he wants to do, but you and me and Teddy, we're out.'\_\*\*

\*\*\_'I want to quit too, but I am not leaving without Kyle.'\_\*\*

\_What's this?' Diggle asked as he entered the Lair.\_

\_I dropped a bug in Derek Reston's jacket,' Oliver replied as he paused the recording.\_

\_I thought you were going to give the man a second chance.'\_

\_That's what I believe in. I also believe in covering all my bases.' He resumed the recording.\_

\*\*\_'Derek we can't abandon our son. After all this time, he wants to end up a winner. Set for life. Otherwise, what was the point?' \_\*\*\_his wife asked.\_

\_After a moment Reston replied, \*\*\_'All right. One more.'\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>A collective groan of disappointment rippled through the room.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The three eavesdroppers stared at the computer with grim faces. Finally Diggle asked, 'Now what?'<em>

\_We take them down,' Matthew replied flatly.\_

\_As they arrived at the CNRI benefit gala a short time later, Oliver handed the bodyguard a radio and earpiece. 'Monitor the Restons with this. When you get a line on their plans, we move,' he instructed.\_

\_And you're gonna do another abrupt exit?'\_

\_We're getting better at it with practice,' Oliver replied. Diggle snickered as both brothers went up the steps.\_

\_Inside, Tommy instructed a waitress, 'Honey, keep the alcohol flowing.' She nodded as he picked up a glass and turned to see Laurel

coming toward him with a smile. 'I can't - wow. You look just really lovely,' he told her.\_

\_ 'Lovely?' \_

\_ 'Yeah.' \_

\_ 'Well, it's nice that you've extended your vocabulary from words like hot and mega hot,' she mocked lightly.\_

\_ 'You can just say thank you, you know,' he replied.\_

\_ 'Thank you - you know,' she said.\_

\_ 'You're welcome.' \_

\_ Joanna walked up. 'Tommy. This is wonderful. It means the world to us.' \_

\_ He was about to reply when he caught sight of Thea Queen. 'Oh, God. Excuse me, just for a second.' He headed in her direction as Laurel and Joanna exchanged looks. \_

\_ 'So?' Joanna asked, arching an eyebrow at her friend.\_

\_ 'You were right,' Laurel admitted.\_

\_ Tommy reached Thea. 'Thank you for coming,' he said, giving her a kiss on the cheek.\_

\_ 'Thank you for inviting me,' she replied.\_

\_ 'Well, I figured the entire Queen family and their checkbooks should be present.' \_

\_ 'Oh, right. And how is that going for you so far?' \_

\_ 'It is going amazing. And all thanks to you,' he told her. She tilted her head. 'Thea Queen, the unlikely voice of reason.' \_

\_ 'Oh, me? What did I do?' she asked with a smile.\_

\_ 'You gave me that great advice. I thought about what the girl was interested in and, uh -' he turned to see where Laurel was, and Thea's smile disappeared.\_

\_ 'And you did this for Laurel,' she said a trifle shakily. Tommy didn't notice.\_

\_ 'And it's working.' He chuckled. 'Thanks again, Speedy.' \_

\_ 'Yeah. Anytime,' she muttered as he left. Taking a glass from a roving waiter's tray, she downed it in a single gulp.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea flushed scarlet and buried her face in her hands. Tommy shifted uncomfortably but said nothing.<p>

"And you had to go for the alcohol," Matthew said in exasperation. He

sighed. "Drinking won't solve your problems, Thea."

"I know," she mumbled.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Making his way back to where Laurel stood with Carter Bowen, Tommy eyed the man uneasily. 'Oh, Tommy, do you remember Carter Bowen from high school?' Laurel asked.<em>

\_'Oh, yeah, sure I do. So glad you could make it,' he replied with a false smile as he shook hands with Carter.\_

\_'It's so great to see you,' Carter told Laurel softly. 'You look amazing.' Tommy's smile disappeared. 'I gotta say I'm so impressed with the work that you and CNRI are doing,' Carter continued.\_

\_'Thanks, Carter,' Laurel replied.\_

\_'You know, I've actually been thinking about starting a free clinic down here in the Glades,' he confided.\_

\_'Really?' Tommy interjected.\_

\_ 'Can we grab a couple drinks and I'll tell you what I'm thinking?' Carter asked, looking at Laurel.\_

\_She appeared stunned for a moment, then recovered herself. 'That sounds great.' She took his arm and they walked off, Laurel throwing a smile at Tommy over her shoulder. He returned it, but only briefly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Asshole," Tommy growled.<p>

"Jealous?" Laurel teased. He only snorted.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Elsewhere, Oliver made his way to his mother, who was standing at the bar with a drink in hand. 'It's a creative space. Gorgeous,' she was saying. <em>

\_He leaned close to her and said, 'Hi.'\_

\_She looked at him in surprise before turning to the waitress. 'Excuse me.' Turning to him, she remarked, 'Well, I'm surprised you made it tonight, given your hectic schedule.'\_

\_'Mom, I messed up with the Bowens yesterday,' he admitted. 'I made you a promise. I couldn't keep it.'\_

\_'Well, it's nothing new for you, Oliver,' she reminded him sharply. She paused a moment before continuing, 'I know you and I have had our difficulties, but despite all my many mistakes, I always thought that you and I had a connection.' He started to speak, but she cut him off. 'So can you imagine, just imagine, after being granted the miracle of having two of my children returned to me, that you seem to

have little or no interest in being with me or telling me the truth. Matthew certainly makes more of an effort to spend time with me and Robbie than you do.'\_\_

\_Her words hit home. Ashamed and hurt, Oliver was about to speak but Diggle's arrival prevented him. 'Ma'am,' he said to Moira, who shot him a harsh glare.\_\_

\_'Redwood United Bank,' Diggle said in a low voice for Oliver's ears only. 'They're gonna try a nighttime hit.'\_\_

\_Oliver sighed in resignation and looked at his mother. 'I have to go. I'm sorry.' He winced at the crestfallen look on her face.

><em>

\_'No, don't bother apologizing,' she snapped. 'Honestly, Oliver, there are times when I wonder why you bother coming home at all.' She turned away from him.

><em>

\_Across the room Matthew was trying, without success, to convince his inebriated twin to go home. 'You're drunk, Thea. You really need to go home.'\_\_

\_She glared at him. 'What if I am?' she asked bitingly. 'Maybe I prefer it that way.'\_\_

\_He sighed in frustration, raking his fingers through his hair. 'Do you want Mom to see you like this, or Oliver? Come on, Thea. Think about others beside yourself for once.'\_\_

\_She shook her head. 'I don't care what Mom or Oliver think.'\_\_

\_'Or me?'\_\_

\_She leaned close to him and he had to fight the urge to step away. 'It's sweet of you to care, Matt, but you forget I am seven minutes older than you, so you don't really have the right to lecture me about what I do.' Just then Oliver strode past, his eyes meeting Matthew's. He jerked his head toward the door. Matthew threw his hands up in surrender and stormed after Oliver.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Moira and Thea both winced, ashamed at their behavior.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>At Redwood United Bank, a security guard was making the rounds when the sound of a gun cocking behind him caused him to turn. He saw Derek Reston standing there - and Kyle Reston leaped out of the shadows, onto the guard's back, his hands wrapping around the man's neck. He choked the guard into unconsciousness. The two then blew the safe door and proceeded to empty it of the money.

<em>

\_'Three minutes,' Derek told his son.\_\_

\_'OK,' Kyle replied. They worked in silence until the sound of a door

opening distracted them. 'You hear that?' Kyle said. After listening for a few seconds, he offered, 'I'll check it out.'\_

\_ 'All right,' his father replied with a nod. Kyle lowered his mask, popped the safety off his gun, and took something in his other hand before heading cautiously out of the safe as his father resumed bagging the cash.\_

\_The archers were waiting in the lobby near the still unconscious guard. 'Kyle Reston,' the red hooded one growled.\_

\_He loosed an arrow, but Kyle lifted the plastic riot shield he had retrieved before leaving the safe and the arrow bounced harmlessly off it. 'I came prepared,' he said mockingly. He lifted his gun and fired. The archers leaped away, diving over the counter. Kyle rushed over and looked behind it, but did not see either of them. Inside the safe, Derek paused on hearing the gunfire, then lowered his mask and rushed out.\_

\_Still not seeing his targets, Kyle turned around - and took an arrow to the shoulder. He grunted in pain, but broke the shaft with the edge of his shield and tossed it aside. Oliver loosed another arrow, but once again Kyle blocked it before running straight at them. Matthew managed to leap out of the way, stumbling and falling as he did so, but Kyle rammed straight into Oliver, the two of them flying back through several glass partitions, sending shards everywhere, until they were stopped by the far wall.\_

\_Outside the bank, Mrs. Reston and her son glanced at each other worriedly on hearing the commotion from inside. 'It's OK. It's gonna be OK,' she tried to reassure Ted.\_

\_Oliver and Kyle traded blows for a few seconds before Oliver flipped Kyle onto his back. Kyle quickly rolled back to his feet, though, and the slugging match resumed. Matthew staggered to his feet and shook his head to clear it, slightly dazed since Kyle's shield had clipped the side of his head, and was about to leap back into the fray when the now conscious guard intervened.\_

\_He held a shotgun on Oliver, who raised his hand in a placating gesture. 'No, hey, I got this.'\_

\_At that moment Derek Reston ran out. Matthew loosed an arrow, sending Derek's gun spinning away. Kyle raised his own weapon to fire at the guard. 'Drop your weapon! Now!' the guard shouted. He squeezed the trigger just as Derek jumped in front of his son. The older man took the bullet full in the chest and fell to the floor.\_

\_Oliver swiftly disarmed Kyle and flipped him to the floor before knocking him out. The guard looked back and forth between the Hoods in confusion, not certain what to do.\_

\_Matthew rushed over to kneel beside the injured Derek Reston. 'He's bleeding out,' he said tensely, noting the widening pool of blood under Derek's body. 'Call an ambulance. Now!' he barked, glancing at the guard. The guard rushed off to do so as Oliver knelt beside his brother and removed Derek's mask.\_

\_ 'Kyle! Kyle,' the injured man gasped.\_

\_ 'He's OK. He's just knocked out,' Oliver told him as they lowered their hoods so Derek could see their faces. His eyes widened. \_

\_ 'It wasn't his fault. I turned my son into this,' Derek gasped. Oliver closed his eyes.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, I didn't expect that,' Tommy said, looking back and forth between Oliver and Matthew.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea<strong></em></p>

\_ Oliver pulled the trigger, but the only sound was click. The gun was empty.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Even the cops and Diggle were startled by the abrupt flashback. The only ones who did not react were Ra's, his children, and Malcolm.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Groaning in frustration, he threw the useless weapon to the ground and glared at his father. 'Of course it doesn't work. I'm hallucinating. Or I'm dreaming,' he said disgustedly.<em>

\_ 'But if you weren't -' Robert said. 'You betrayed me, Oliver. I died so that you could live, and you threw that gift away. You made that sacrifice empty.'\_

\_ 'I'm not you. I'm not. I'm not strong like you,' Oliver asserted, shaking his head. 'I never was.'\_

\_ 'I told you, I'm not the man you think I am,' his father said. Shaking his head, he turned away. 'The things I've done. What I was about to do.'\_

\_ 'Dad - Dad. What does that mean? Please. I don't know what that means,' Oliver begged helplessly.\_

\_ Robert turned back, pointing a finger at his son. 'I told you. I begged you. Right my wrongs! This is your responsibility now.'\_

\_ 'How? How do I do this? I can't even get off this island,' Oliver said with a bitter smile.\_

\_ Robert laid his hands on Oliver's shoulders. 'I'm sorry I didn't tell you the truth about me. But I hope - I hope that you know that I love you both.' Oliver only nodded.\_

\*\*\_2012\_\*\*

\_ Oliver was jolted back to reality by the sound of police sirens.\_  
\_ With a gasp, Derek Reston breathed his last.\_\_ Matthew sighed sadly

and reached out to gently close Reston's eyes. As the flashing lights flickered into the bank, the brothers pulled their hoods up and left seconds before the cops entered to find the body on the floor.\_

\_At the gala, Tommy watched dejectedly as Laurel danced with Carter Bowen. 'Did you know that as a doctor, I was able to diagnose myself as a giant tool?' he muttered mockingly as he sipped his drink. \_

\_A second later Thea - considerably more drunk than she had been a short time earlier - came up to him. 'How about a dance, handsome?' she slurred as she leaned on his shoulder. \_

\_'Hey, uh, I thought that we agreed that you were going to call me before you did something stupid,' he pointed out with a frown, setting his glass down.\_

\_'See, you're no fun,' she replied with a smile. 'I'm going to show you how to have some fun.' She laced her hands together behind his head to pull him closer.\_

\_'Whoa, whoa! What are you doing?' he interrupted, forcing her hands down.\_

\_She scowled at him. 'You said I was amazing.'\_

\_'Yeah, you are amazing, but you're also like my sister. My baby sister,' he emphasized.\_

\_'Well, I'm not a baby anymore,' she replied with a frown. 'Thank you for noticing.' She glanced over his shoulder at Laurel and Carter. 'Laurel doesn't even like you. She doesn't understand you. I do. Why can't you just see that?'\_

\_'Thea,' he said, trying to defuse the situation as he steered her away. 'Thea, it was a mistake to talk to you about girls and stuff. It was inappropriate, and I think it may have confused you.'\_

\_She smiled sourly. 'Yeah, the rejection? It is pretty clear. Even if it wasn't, between my mom and Oliver and everybody in my entire life, I'm pretty much used to it by now, so -' She turned to walk away - and bumped into a waiter, sending his tray clattering to the floor. The sound of breaking glass drew everyone's attention.\_

\_'Whoa, whoa,' Tommy said quickly, taking her by the arm. 'OK, let's go. Let's go. Come on.' He steered her outside.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea steadfastly avoided looking at her parents, her brothers, or Walter, though she could feel their eyes on her.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>A few minutes later Laurel came outside to look for them. Tommy leaned against his car with his jacket off, watching over Thea as she retched. 'Tommy?'<em>

\_'Yep.'\_

\_'Is Thea OK?' she asked in concern.\_



\_ 'Oh, yeah, she just ate some bad crab cakes,' he lied smoothly.\_

\_ 'Are you sure it wasn't something she drank?' she asked wryly - they both well knew why Thea was puking.\_

\_ He cleared his throat. 'Don't worry. I got this. You can go back inside, keep having fun. Looked like you were having a nice little do-si-do with the good doctor.'\_

\_ She paused for a moment before replying. 'Tommy, I'm going to let you in on a little known secret about Dr. Carter Bowen.' He tilted his head. 'The man is a gigantic ass.' He chuckled. 'And the only reason why I danced with him is because he wrote a massive check to CNRI. Why would you think anything else?'\_

\_ 'I guess when it comes to you, I tend not to think straight.' They both smiled.\_

\_ Thea stumbled over. 'Can you call me a cab?' she asked weakly.\_

\_ 'Absolutely not,' Tommy told her. 'I am taking you home. Get in.' He opened the front passenger door for her.\_

\_ 'I apologize for making such a scene,' Thea told them, embarrassed.\_

\_ 'Just feel better, OK?' Laurel said gently. Thea nodded and ducked her head as Tommy closed the door.\_

\_ 'Hey, Tommy,' Laurel said suddenly.\_

\_ 'Yeah?'\_

\_ 'I owe you a dance. You earned it.' She kissed him lightly on the cheek and turned to go back inside. He watched her go with a grin before walking around to the driver's side of the car and getting in.\_

\_ 'Please don't hate me,' Thea said timidly. \_

\_ He looked at her. 'No, no. Never,' he reassured her as he started the engine.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Thea smiled gratefully at her older brother. "Thank you."<p>

"Anytime," he replied softly. Moira patted his arm and Malcolm gave his son an approving nod.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Back at the factory the brothers sat in the dark, still in their gear. They didn't look up when Diggle entered.<em>

\_ 'What went down wasn't your fault.'\_

\_ 'I didn't say it was,' Oliver replied.\_

\_ 'Oliver, it wasn't your fault, man,' Diggle insisted. 'You gave Reston a chance. That was more than he deserved.'\_

\_ 'I'm not so sure about that.'\_

\_ 'Well, listen, I'll tell you this much. You say going after the guys on that list is the way you honored your dad?' They both nodded. 'Well, if your dad could have seen you this week, the way you cared about the people he had hurt, the way you stepped up to try to help them, I'd say he'd be pretty damn honored. So maybe there is more than one way to save this city,' he concluded.\_

\_ 'Maybe,' Oliver concurred.\_

\_ 'By the way, Stan Washington woke up,' Diggle said as he turned to leave. That brought their eyes to him. 'He's going to be fine.' He walked out, leaving them alone with their thoughts.\_

\*\*\_Five Years Ago - 2007 - Lian Yu, North China Sea\_\*\*

\_ Oliver woke with a gasp, panting. Sunlight filtered into the cave. Beside him Matthew still slept. Trying to calm himself, Oliver sat up. Opening the notebook, he tore a page out and held it over the fire, ready to drop it in - only to pause as he saw writing appear on the page. He turned it over, wondering, as the writing became clearer, the entire page filled with a list of names. Picking up the book, he held it over the fire, staring in amazement as more names appeared on the pages. He reached over and shook Matthew awake. 'Matt!'\_

\_ 'What is it?' his brother mumbled, looking blearily up at him, his hair flying in all directions.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Snorts of laughter could be heard from Thea, Felicity, Iris, William, and Cisco at Matthew's disheveled state. Said teen rolled his eyes in exasperation and leaned over to swat his sister on the arm.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Take a look at this!'

\_ 'How?'\_

\_ 'I don't know, but this must be part of what Dad meant when he asked us to right his wrongs,' Oliver replied. He stared down at the book. 'My responsibility,' he whispered. 'I promise, Dad. I promise.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>"So that's how you found the List," Tommy said.<p>

Oliver nodded. "Invisible ink. Perfect way to hide something like

that."

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>2012<strong>\_

\_At the mansion, Moira was pouring herself a drink. The brothers paused in the doorway to the sitting room. 'Nightcap?' Oliver asked.\_

\_She was momentarily startled to see them. 'Well, I thought it might help me. I - I don't sleep well alone,' she admitted as she drank. Apparently reaching a decision, she sighed and turned to face her sons. 'I'm sorry about what I said tonight.'\_

\_Oliver shook his head. 'No. You were being honest.'\_

\_ 'No, not entirely,' Moira denied. 'The truth is, with Walter being gone, I'm - I'm lonely,' she said, then, 'You know, you and I used to talk. I used to know what you were thinking. But now, even when you're home, you're somewhere else. I - I guess I just miss my sons.'\_

\_Olive smiled softly. 'I miss you too. And I wish that -' he paused, an idea coming to him. 'Are you hungry?'\_

\_At the Big Belly Burger, the three sat at a table as a waitress brought their orders. 'Thank you,' Oliver said.\_

\_Moira picked up her fork and knife and started to eat. Matthew smiled in amusement as he began to eat his own burger. 'Mom - it's OK to get your hands dirty every once in a while.' She looked at him. 'For us. Please.'\_

\_ 'All right,' she said, dropping the utensils and picking the burger up in her hands. 'Yeah,' she said after taking a bite. 'That is a great burger. Thank you for this.'\_

\_ 'Anytime,' Oliver replied.\_

\_ 'You know, I'll bet Carter Bowen doesn't know where to find the best burger joint in Starling City,' Moira mused.\_

\_ 'So I have one thing on him,' Oliver said.\_

\_ 'No. You both have everything on him, Oliver,' Moira said firmly, laying a hand on his arm. Matthew smiled and nudged his mother's shoulder.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Matthew, Thea, and Oliver laughed as the screen faded to black. Moira arched an eyebrow at her children. "I wasn't always prim and proper, you know."<p>

Malcolm grinned. "No, you weren't, Moira."

Quentin barely suppressed a groan, for he was certain he knew what Merlyn meant by that, but before he could say anything the next recording started.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes<em>

\_1.) Young \*\*Roy \*\*will be addressed as \*\*William \*\*(his middle name)  
most of the time from here on out to distinguish between him and  
\*\*2033 Roy.\*\*\_

End  
file.